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Office of the Historian
Bureau of Public Affairs
U.S. Department of State
May 2018

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Preface

The publication Foreign Relations of the United States constitutes the official record of the foreign policy of the United States. The volumes in the series include, subject to necessary security considerations, all documents needed to give a comprehensive record of the major foreign policy decisions of the United States together with appropriate materials concerning the facts that contributed to the formulation of policies. Documents in the files of the Department of State are supplemented by papers from other government agencies involved in the formulation of foreign policy. This volume also includes documents from the private collections of various government officials connected with U.S. policy toward Vietnam.

The basic documentary diplomatic record printed in the volumes of the series is edited by the Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, Department of State. The editing is guided by the principles of historical objectivity and in accordance with the following official guidance first promulgated by Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg on March 26, 1925:

There may be no alteration of the text, no deletions without indicating the place in the text where the deletion is made, and no omission of facts which were of major importance in reaching a decision. Nothing may be omitted for the purpose of concealing or glossing over what might be regarded by some as a defect of policy. However, certain omissions of documents are permissible for the following reasons:

- a. To avoid publication of matters that would tend to impede current diplomatic negotiations or other business.
- b. To condense the record and avoid repetition of needless details.
- c. To preserve the confidence reposed in the Department by individuals and by foreign governments.
- d. To avoid giving needless offense to other nationalities or individuals.
- e. To eliminate personal opinions presented in despatches and not acted upon by the Department. To this consideration there is one qualification: in connection with major decisions it is desirable, where possible, to show the alternative presented to the Department before the decision was made.

Principles of Selection for Foreign Relations, 1961-1963, Volume IV

Document selection for this volume proceeded on the basis of a research plan developed by the editors after a preliminary review of repositories in both governmental and private agencies. From the outset the editors approached their research realizing the need to supplement the written record of U.S. policy during the Vietnam war with interviews of officials who participated in the policy process. Early attention was also given to those oral history interviews of participants already in existence and available in various locations. Oral history citations are provided in the footnotes to the text.

On the basis of their preliminary research and review of already-published documentation, including the 1971 "Pentagon Papers," the editors developed the following five areas of focus for the research and selection of documents for inclusion in this volume: 1) Discussion and formulation of policy in Washington; 2) Policy implementation in South Vietnam; 3) The relationship among the United States Government, the Diem government, and dissident elements in South Vietnam; 4) U.S. intelligence assessments of the viability of the Diem government and the prospects of potential coup plotters; and 5) U.S. military involvement in Vietnam.

Discussion and formulation of policy in Washington: President John F. Kennedy and, after his assassination on November 22, 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson, made the important policy decisions on Vietnam. They received advice from the Washington foreign affairs community, either orally at meetings or in documents. The records of these meetings with the Presidents and advice provided to them in writing are the focus of this volume. The editors are confident that they have had complete access to all the Presidential written records bearing on Vietnam.

The most important repositories for records on the formulation of U.S. policy toward Vietnam are the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Libraries. The records of the Department of State, to which the editors had complete access, include a large segment of Presidential and National Security Council documentation, but the Kennedy and Johnson Libraries remain the single most comprehensive sources. The papers of the President's Military Representative, General Maxwell D. Taylor, at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C., are also of unusual importance. The documents in the Taylor Papers provide a unique record of Taylor's advice to the President on Vietnam and records of some meetings both at the White House and at the Department of Defense for which there are no other accounts. Department of Defense

records, especially files and papers of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, located at the Washington National Records Center, are an important subsidiary source. A private collection, the W. Averell Harriman Papers, are also of considerable interest. Used with the permission of the late Ambassador Harriman when they were still in his possession, they are now housed at the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division. The Roger Hilsman papers, located at the Kennedy Library, also proved an important source of documents not found in official files.

Policy implementation in Vietnam: The editors also selected documentation that covered the implementation of Presidentially-established policy and a small range of lesser policy decisions that did not reach the White House or were resolved in the Department of State or other agencies of the foreign affairs community. The files of the Department of State, the Kennedy and Johnson Libraries, and the United States Information Agency are the primary documentary sources for these decisions.

The relationship among the United States Government, the Diem government, and dissident elements in South Vietnam: From late August 1963, when this volume begins, to the overthrow of the Diem government on November 1, 1963, the United States strongly supported the Republic of Vietnam, but the relationship was strained. The extensive reports of U.S. Embassy relations with the Diem government come primarily from the central files of the Department of State.

The fact that the United States was in close contact with dissident elements in South Vietnam makes events in Saigon crucial to understanding U.S. policy. The editors have, therefore, included a considerable number of telegraphic reports from the Embassy and the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon on relations with dissident Vietnamese. Central Intelligence Agency records were obtained from the Kennedy Library, Department of State files, the Taylor Papers, Department of Defense records, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff files. The CIA provided full access to the Department historians to Agency documents in the Presidential libraries, and many of these documents are printed here. Some access was eventually provided to documentation retained by the Agency itself, but too late for documents to be included in this volume. Significant declassified material obtained from the CIA archives for 1963 will be printed in a subsequent volume in the Foreign Relations series.

U.S. intelligence estimates of the viability of the Diem government and the potential prospects of coup plotters: The ability of the U.S. Government to estimate the viability of the Diem government and the prospects for potential coup plotters are of central importance during a period in which there was extensive planning for a coup and then a successful overthrow of President Diem. This volume and its companion, documenting the first part of 1963 (volume III), include communications between the Central Intelligence Agency and its Station in Saigon. In addition to these telegrams, a representative selection of finished intelligence assessments prepared by the U.S. intelligence community is printed.

U.S. military involvement in Vietnam: The editors sought to include documentation that illustrated the relationship between military planning and strategy and the conduct of relations with the Republic of Vietnam and other countries. No attempt was made to document operational details of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. The Taylor Papers, the files of the Secretary of Defense and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs at the Washington National Records Center, and the decentralized files of the Department of State's Vietnam Working Group are the principal sources for this topic.

The question of press coverage of developments in Vietnam and U.S. involvement became less sensitive during the latter part of 1963, but still remained an important issue. Documentation relating to public affairs and press relations is located in the files of the United States Information Agency.

The editors of the volume are confident that the documents printed here provide a comprehensive and accurate foreign affairs record of United States policy toward and involvement in Vietnam during the last four months of 1963. The declassification review process for the documents selected for this volume, outlined in more detail below, resulted in withholding from publication only 1.7 percent of the original manuscript.

The editors wish to acknowledge the assistance of officials at the National Archives and Records Administration's John F. Kennedy Library and Lyndon B. Johnson Libraries, in particular Suzanne Forbes and David Humphry. Susan Lemke at the National Defense University and Sandra Meagher at the Department of Defense deserve special thanks, as do former government officials who consented to oral history interviews for this volume.

Editorial Methodology

The documents are presented chronologically according to Washington time. Incoming telegrams from U.S. missions are placed according to time of receipt in the Department of State or other receiving agency, rather than the time of transmission; memoranda of conversation are placed according to the time and date of the conversation, rather than the date the memorandum was drafted. The editors were not always able to determine the precise chronological order of documents produced during periods of crisis and intense activity, particularly during the November 1 coup. In these cases they used their best judgment.

Editorial treatment of the documents published in the Foreign Relations series follows Office style guidelines, supplemented by guidance from the Editor in Chief and the chief technical editor. The source text is reproduced as exactly as possible, including marginalia or other notations, which are described in the footnotes. Obvious typographical errors are corrected, but other mistakes and omissions in the source text are corrected by bracketed insertions: a correction is set in italic type; an omission in roman type. Bracketed insertions are also used to indicate text that has been omitted because it deals with an unrelated subject (in roman type) or because it remained classified after the declassification review process (in italic type). The amount of material not declassified has been noted by indicating the number of lines or pages of source text that were omitted. All ellipses and brackets that appear in the source text are so identified by footnotes.

The first footnote to each document indicates the document's source, original classification, distribution, and drafting information. The source footnote also provides the background of important documents and policies and indicates if the President and/or his major policy advisers read it. Every effort has been made to determine if a document has been previously published and this information has been included in the source footnote. If two or more different accounts of a meeting or event of comparable value are available and one or more is already declassified and published, the editors chose to print the still unpublished one and obtain its declassification.

Editorial notes and additional annotation summarize pertinent material not printed in this volume, indicate the location of additional documentary sources, provide references to important related documents printed in other volumes, describe key events, and summarize and provide citations to public statements that supplement and elucidate the

printed documents. Information derived from memoirs and other first-hand accounts has been used when applicable to supplement the official record.

Declassification Review Procedures

Declassification review of the documents selected for publication was conducted by the Division of Historical Documents Review, Bureau of Diplomatic Security, Department of State. The review was made in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act, the Privacy Act, and the criteria established in Executive Order 12356 regarding:

- 1) military plans, weapons, or operations;
- 2) the vulnerabilities or capabilities of systems, installations, projects, or plans relating to the national security;
- 3) foreign government information;
- 4) intelligence activities (including special activities), or intelligence sources or methods;
- 5) foreign relations or foreign activities of the United States;
- 6) scientific, technological, or economic matters relating to national security;
- 7) U.S. Government programs for safeguarding nuclear materials or facilities;
- 8) cryptology; and
- 9) a confidential source.

Declassification decisions entailed concurrence of the appropriate geographic and functional bureaus in the Department of State, other concerned agencies of the U.S. Government, and appropriate foreign governments regarding documents of those governments. The principle guiding declassification review is to release as much information as is consistent with contemporary requirements of national security and sound foreign relations.

Edward C. Keefer compiled and edited the volume under the supervision of Charles S. Sampson, the Vietnam project leader, and Editor in Chief John P. Glennon. Suzanne E. Coffman of the Office of the Historian prepared the lists of names and abbreviations. Rita M. Baker performed the technical editing. Barbara A. Bacon of the Publishing Services Division (Paul M. Washington, Chief) oversaw production of the volume. Max Franke prepared the index.

William Z. Slany
The Historian
Bureau of Public Affairs

List of Sources

Unpublished Sources

Department of State

1.

Subject-Numeric Indexed Central Files. In February 1963, the Department changed its decimal central files to a subject-numeric central file system. This volume and its companion, volume III, are the first to be published in the Foreign Relations series in which the Department's central files come exclusively from the new system. As part of the transition from the old to two system, the Department of State encouraged its indexers to cross references extensively and to include the first page of the referenced document in the cross referenced file. The system allows the researcher to begin in a basic file and by noting the cross references discover other pertinent files.

The subject-numeric system was divided into broad categories: Administration, Consular, Culture and Information, Economic, Political and Defense, Science, and Social. Within each of these divisions were subcategories. For example, Political and Defense contained four subtopics: POL (politics), DEF (Defense), CSM (Communism), and INT (Intelligence). Numerical subdivisions further defined them. For example, POL 15-1 was used for documentation concerning the head of state and/or the Executive Branch of any country. Therefore POL 15-1 S VIET contains documentation on South Vietnam's President; POL 15-1 CAMB would contain documentation of Cambodia's Head of State, Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

The following were the principal files used in this volume:

- POL S VIET and POL 1 S VIET, both containing background material for general policy
- POL 2 S VIET, general reports and statistics
- POL 14 S VIET, elections
- POL 15 S VIET, government
- POL 15-1 S VIET, head of government/Executive branch
- POL 16 S VIET, recognition of the new government
- POL 18 S VIET, provincial and municipal government

POL 26 S VIET, undesignated but used in Vietnam for coup
 planning
 POL 27 S VIET, military operations
 POL 27-10 S VIET, chemical weapons
 POL 30-1 S VIET, asylum.
 POL 27 VIET, military operations
 POL 32-4 VIET, territorial waters
 The system could also combine two countries or a country and an
 individual. Files of these types cited in this volume were:
 POL 8 S VIET-US, U.S.-South Vietnamese discussions of neutralism
 and non-alignment
 POL US-MCNAMEARA and POL 7 US-MCNAMEARA, documentation
 relating to the Secretary of Defense generally and to his trips
 POL CAMB-S VIET, general South Vietnamese-Cambodian relations
 POL 27-13 CAMB, Cambodia's neutrality in the Vietnam war

The POL Files comprise the most cited sources in the volume, but
 there are other files containing important documentation. Much of
 the documentation on the Buddhist opposition to the Diem
 government are found in the social category, SOC (social relations)
 12-1 S VIET, churches and sects including clergy (bonzes) and SOC
 14-1 S VIET, general human rights policies in South Vietnam. Most
 military-related documents were in DEF 19 S VIET, the general file
 for military assistance to Vietnam or in DEF 19 US-S VIET, U.S.
 military assistance to South Vietnam. The CSM S VIET file was
 surprisingly sparse, indicating that it was little used by indexers
 during this period. Documentation on economic assistance was
 found almost exclusively in AID (US) S VIET ORG 7 OSD is a
 administrative file used for the visits of Secretary of Defense
 McNamara; PER-LODGE, HENRY CABOT is Ambassador Lodge's
 personnel file; INF 8 US is the basic psychological operations file; FT
 1 S VIET is the general policy file for South Vietnam's finances.

2. *Lot Files.* Documents from the central files have been supplemented
 by materials from decentralized office files, the lot files of the
 Department of State. A list of the major lot files used or consulted
 follows:

Bundy Files: Lot 85 D 240

Files of William R Bundy for the 1960s, first as Deputy Assistant
 Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs and then
 Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs after 1964.

Conference Files: Lot 66 D 110

Collection of documentation on international conferences abroad attended by the President, the Secretary of State, and other U.S. officials, May 1961-December 1964

Har-Van Files

Files created for Ambassador Averell Harriman and Cyrus Vance, Delegates to the Paris Peace Conference in 1968. Background documents beginning in the early 1960s. The file contains texts of documents found nowhere else.

Presidential Correspondence: Lot 66 D 204

Exchanges of correspondence between the President and heads of foreign governments, 1953-1964, as maintained by the Executive Secretariat.

Presidential Memoranda of Conversation: Lot 66 D 149

Cleared memoranda of Presidential conversations with foreign visitors, 1956-1964, as maintained by the Executive Secretariat.

Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192

Files of Secretary of State Dean Rusk 1961-1969, including texts of speeches, miscellaneous correspondence files, White House correspondence, chronological files, and memoranda of telephone conversations.

Secretary's Memoranda of Conversation: Lot 65 D 330

Memoranda of the Secretaries of State and Under Secretaries of State, 1961-1964

Secretary's Staff Meetings: Lot 66 D 147

Records of the Secretary of State's Staff Meetings, 1961-1963, and additional ad hoc meetings, reports, papers, and memoranda of Chester Bowles' telephone conversations.

S/P Files: Lot 70 D 199

Files of the Policy Planning Council for the years 1963-1964.

Special Group for Counterinsurgency Files: Lot 68 D 451

Minutes and memoranda of the Special Group for Counterinsurgency, January 1962-December 1963.

S/S-NSC Files: Lot 70 D 265

Master set of papers pertaining to National Security Council meetings, including policy papers, position papers, and administrative documents for the years 1961-1966, as maintained by the Executive Secretariat.

S/S-NSC Files: Lot 72 D 316

Master file of National Security Action Memoranda (NSAMs) for the years 1961-1968, as maintained by the Executive Secretariat.

S/S-NSC (Miscellaneous) Files: Lot 66 D 95

Administrative and miscellaneous National Security Council documentation, including NSC Records of Action, 1947-1963, as

maintained by the Executive Secretariat.
Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54
Files of the interagency Vietnam Working Group, 1963-1964.
Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 72 D 219
Top Secret files of the interagency Vietnam Working Group, 1963-1967.

National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.
Record Group 46, Records of the U.S. Senate
Files of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Record Group 59
Files of the Office of Public Opinion Studies, Bureau of Public Affairs, Department of State

Washington National Records Center, Suitland, Maryland
Record Group 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the United States
Saigon Embassy Files: FRC 67 A 677
Classified records of the Embassy in Saigon for the years 1962-1963 (formerly Lot 66 F 57).
Saigon Embassy Files: FRC 68 A 5159
Top Secret files of the Embassy in Saigon for the years 1955-1963.
Record Group 306, Records of the United States Information Agency
USIA/TOP Files: FRC 67 A 222
Subject files of the Office of Policy for the years 1963-1965.
Record Group 330, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense
McNamara Files: FRC 31 A 3470
Files of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara for the years 1961-1968.
OSD Files: FRC 69 A 3131
Official records of the Secretary of Defense, Deputy Secretary of Defense, and Special Assistant to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary for 1963.
OSD Files: FRC 71 A 6489
Miscellaneous records of the Secretary, Deputy Secretary of Defense, and their assistants for the years 1951,n.1966.
Record Group 334, Records of Interservice
Records of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, 1962 and after.

National Defense University, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C.
Taylor Papers
Papers of General Maxwell D. Taylor, Chief of Staff of the Army, 1955-1959; Military Adviser to the President, 1961-1962; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1962-1964.

John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts
Hilsman Papers

- National Security Files
 - Chester V. Clifton Series
 - Departments and Agencies Series
 - Meetings and Memoranda Series
 - Regional Security Series
 - Trip and Conference Series
 - Country Series, Vietnam
- President's Appointment Book (cited as President's Log Book)
- President's Office Files
 - Staff Memoranda
 - Vietnam Security
- Schlesinger Papers
- Sorensen Papers
- Thompson Papers
- Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, Texas**
 - Papers of President Lyndon B. Johnson, National Security File
 - Heads of State Correspondence
 - Meeting Notes
 - Memos to the President, McGeorge Bundy
 - NSAMs
 - Country File, Vietnam
 - Rusk Appointment Book
 - Vice Presidential Security File
- Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.**
 - Harriman Papers
 - Special Files of W. Averell Harriman, Public Service, Kennedy and Johnson administrations.

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Memoirs

- Note:* The Department of State takes no responsibility for the accuracy of these memoirs nor endorses their interpretation of the events.
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List of Abbreviations

AAA, anti-aircraft artillery
ABN, airborne
AC&W, aircraft control and warning
ACSI, Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence)
addee, addressee
Admino, series indicator for administrative telegrams from CINCPAC
AF, Air Force
AFCIN, Air Force Chief of Intelligence
AFRS, Armed Forces Radio Service
AID, Agency for International Development
Aidto, series indicator for telegrams from the Agency for International Development to its missions abroad
Amb, Ambassador
ammo, ammunition
AP, Associated Press
APC, armored personnel carrier
ARPAC, U.S. Army, Pacific
ARVN, Army of the Republic of Vietnam
BG, Brigadier General
bn, battalion
CAS, Controlled American Source
CG, Civil Guard
ChiCom, Chinese Communists
ChiNat, Chinese Nationalist
CHMAAG, Chief, Military Assistance Advisory Group
CI, counterinsurgency; commercial imports
CIA, Central Intelligence Agency
CIB, Combined Intelligence Board
CIDG, Citizen's Irregular Defense Group
CINCPAC, Commander in Chief, Pacific
CINCPACAF, Commander in Chief, Pacific Air Force
CINCPACFLT, Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet
CINCUSAPAC, Commander in Chief, United States Army, Pacific
CIP, Commercial Import Program
CM, Chairman's Memorandum
Cmdr, Commander
CNO, Chief of Naval Operations
CO, Commanding Officer
COMUSARPAC, Commander, United States Army, Pacific

COMUSMACV, Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
CONUS, continental United States
COPROR, Committee on Province Rehabilitation
CPSVN, Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam
CSA, Chief of Staff, Army
CSAF, Chief of Staff, Air Force
CSCC, Coastal Surveillance Command Center
CT, Country Team
CVN, Central Vietnam
CVTC, Confederation of Vietnamese Trade Congresses
CY, calendar year
DA, Department of the Army; Defense Attaché; defense assistance
DAC, Development Assistance Committee, Organization for Economic
Cooperation and Development
DCFBA, Director General of Budget and Foreign Aid
DCI, Director of Central Intelligence
DCM, Deputy Chief of Mission
Deptel, Department of State telegram
desp, despatch
DGI, Director General of Information
DIA, Defense Intelligence Agency
dissem, dissemination
DLF, Defense Loan Fund
DMZ, demilitarized zone
DOD, Department of Defense
DOD/PRO, Public Relations Office, Department of Defense
DRV, Democratic Republic of Vietnam
DTG, date-time-group
E & E, emergency and evacuation
ECCO, Eastern Construction Company
Embtel, Embassy telegram
FAR, Forces Armées Royales (Royal Armed Forces, Laos)
FBIS, Foreign Broadcast Information Service
FE, Far East; Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State
FOS, follow-on spares
FRC, Federal Records Center
FSO, Foreign Service officer
FY, fiscal year
FYI, for your information
G, Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs
GAO, General Accounting Office
G/PM, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Politico-
Military Affairs

GVN, Government of Vietnam
helo, helicopter
HQS, headquarters
HSAS, Headquarters, Support Activity, Saigon
IAF, Far East Branch, United States Information Agency
ICA, International Cooperation Administration
ICC, International Control Commission
ICSH, International Committee on Strategic Hamlets
ILO, International Labor Organization
INR, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State
IOP, Office of Policy and Research, United States Information Agency
ISA, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International
Security Affairs
JAOC, Joint Air Operation Center
JCS, Joint Chiefs of Staff
JGS, Joint General Staff
JOC, Joint Operations Center
KIA, killed in action
LAS, Long-Range Assistance Strategy
LOC, lines of communication
MA, military assistance
MAAG, Military Assistance Advisory Group
MACV, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MAP, Military Assistance Program
MEC, Military Executive Committee
MRC, Military Revolutionary Council
MSP, Mutual Security Program
NACO, National Agricultural Credit Office
NBC, National Broadcasting Company
NCO, non-commissioned officer
NCP, National Campaign Plan
NEA, Near East and Africa; Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian
Affairs, Department of State
NFLSVN, National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam
Niact, night action
NIE, National Intelligence Estimate
NLHX, Neo Lao Hak Xat
NOA, new obligatory authority
Nofofn, no foreign dissemination
NRM, National Revolutionary Movement
NSA, National Security Agency
NSAM, National Security Action Memorandum
NSC, National Security Council

NVN, North Vietnam
OASD, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense
OCI, Office of Current Intelligence
ODMA, Office of the Director for Military Assistance
OPCON, operational control
OPNL, operational
OPSUM, Operations Summary
P, piaster; Bureau of Public Affairs, Department of State
PACAF, Pacific Air Force
PACFLT, Pacific Fleet
PACOM, Pacific Command
PAO, Public Affairs Officer
PCHT, packing, crating, handling, and
transportation PIC, person in command
P10, Public Information Officer
PIOPS, public information operations
PL, Pathet Lao; Public Law
plt, platoon
PNG, persona non grata
POL, petroleum, oil, and lubricants
POLAD, Political Adviser
POW, prisoner of war
psywar, psychological warfare
psyops, psychological operations
PTT, post, telephone, telegraph
reftel, reference telegram
RG, Record Group
rgt, regiment
RKG, Royal Khmer Government
RLG, Royal Lao Government
RVN, Republic of Vietnam
RVNAF, Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
S, Office of the Secretary of State
SACSA, Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities,
Joint Chiefs of Staff
SDC, Self-Defense Corps
SEA, Southeast Asia; Office of Southeast Asian Affairs, Department of
State
SEATO, Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SecDef, Secretary of Defense
Secto, series indicator for telegrams from the Secretary of State or his
party to the Department of State
Secy, Secretary

SEPES, Service des Etudes Politiques et Sociales (Political and Social Studies Service)
septel, separate telegram
SFHCVN, Special Forces, High Command, Vietnam
SH, Strategic Hamlet
SOA, Office of South Asian Affairs, Department of State
S/P, Policy Planning Staff, Department of State
sqdn, squadron
S/S, Executive Secretariat, Department of State
Stat., United States Statutes at Large
SVN, South Vietnam
TF/Saigon, Task Force in Saigon
TF/SEA, Task Force on Southeast Asia
TF/VN, Task Force on Vietnam
TIAS, Treaties and Other International Agreements Series
Toeid, series indicator for telegrams to the Agency for International Development from its missions abroad
TOC, Tactical Operations Center
Tosec, series indicator for telegrams to the Secretary of State or his party from the Department of State
Tousi, series indicator for telegrams to the United States Information Agency from its missions abroad
UN, United Nations
UNESCO, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPI, United Press International
USA, United States Army
USAF, United States Air Force
USASGV, United States Army Support Group, Vietnam
USIA, United States Information Agency
USIB, United States Intelligence Board
USIS, United States Information Service
Usito, series indicator for telegrams from the United States Information Agency to its missions abroad
USMACV, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
USMC, United States Marine Corps
USN, United States Navy
USOM, United States Operations Mission
USSR, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UST, United States Treaties
VC, Viet Cong
VM, Viet Minh
VN, Vietnam

VNAF, Vietnam Armed Forces; Vietnam Air Force
VNMC, Vietnam Marine Corps
VNN, Vietnam Navy
VNQDD, Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (National Party of Vietnam)
VNSF, Vietnamese Special Forces
VNSFHC, Vietnamese Special Forces High Command
VOA, Voice of America
WG/VN, Working Group on Vietnam
WSM, Women's Solidarity Movement

List of Persons

Alphand, Herve, French Ambassador to the United States
Alsop, Joseph, syndicated columnist
Ball, George W., Under Secretary of State
Barnett, Robert W., Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Economic Affairs from February 3, 1963
Bell, David E., Administrator of the Agency for International Development and member of the Counterinsurgency Group
Blake, Lieutenant General Gordon A., USAF, Director of the National Security Agency
Bohlen, Charles E., Ambassador to France
Bowles, Chester A., President's Special Representative, Adviser on African, Asian, and Latin American Affairs, and Ambassador at Large until July 19, 1963; thereafter Ambassador to India
Brent, Joseph L., Director, Operations Mission in Vietnam
Buffum, William B., Deputy Director of the Office of United Nations Political and Social Affairs, Department of State, until November 10, 1963; thereafter Director
Bui Diem, Dai Viet oppositionist
Bui Van Luong, Vietnamese Minister of the Interior
Bundy, McGeorge, President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs
Bundy, William P., Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
Buu Hoi, Vietnamese Ambassador to the United States
Carroll, Lieutenant General Joseph E, USAF, Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency
Carter, Lieutenant General Marshall S., USA, Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency
Church, Frank, Democratic Senator from Idaho; member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Cleveland, Harlan, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs
Clifton, Major General Chester V., USA, President's Military Aide
Colby, William, Director of the Far East Division, Operations Directorate, Central Intelligence Agency
Conlon, Thomas F., Office of Southeast Asian Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State, after September 1, 1963, and member of the Vietnam Working Group

Cooper, Chester L., Assistant for Policy Support to the Deputy Director for Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, until November 1963; thereafter Assistant Deputy Director for Policy Support

Couve de Murville, Maurice, French Foreign Minister

De Gaulle, Charles, President of France

Diem, see Ngo Dinh Diem

Dillon, C. Douglas, Secretary of the Treasury

Dingeman, Major James W., USA, Executive Secretary of the Special Group for Counterinsurgency

Dinh, see Ton That Dinh

Do Mau, Colonel, (after November 1963, Brigadier General), ARVN, Military Security Service Chief; also political member of the Executive Committee of the Military Revolutionary Council

Do yang Ly, Vietnamese Ambassador to the United States after September 30, 1963.

Don, see Tran Van Don

D'Orlandi Giovanni, Italian Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam

Dungan, Ralph A., President's Special Assistant

Duong Ngoc Lam, Colonel, ARVN, Director, Civil Guard/Self Defense Corps

Duong Van Hieu, Assistant Director for Special Police of the Republic of Vietnam until November 1, 1963

Duong Van ("Big") Minh, Major General, (after November 4, 1963, Lieutenant General), ARVN, Military Adviser to President Diem until November 1, 1963; thereafter Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Revolutionary Council; President of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Vietnam after November 4, 1963

Dutton, Frederick G., Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Affairs

Felt, Admiral Harry D., USN, Commander in Chief, Pacific

Forrestal, Michael V., member, National Security Council Staff

Fraleigh, Albert S., Deputy Assistant Director for Rural Affairs, Operations Mission in Vietnam

Fulbright, J. William, Democratic Senator from Arkansas and Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Gilpatric, Roswell L., Deputy Secretary of Defense and member of the Counterinsurgency Group

Halberstam, David, New York Times correspondent in Vietnam

Harkins, General Paul D., USA, Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam

Harriman, W. Averell, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs until April 3, 1963; thereafter Under Secretary of State for

Political Affairs and Chairman of the Special Group for Counterinsurgency

Helble, John J., Consul in Hue

Helms, Richard, Deputy Director for Plans, Central Intelligence Agency

Hieu, see Ngo Trong Hieu

Higgins, Marguerite, *New York Herald Tribune* correspondent

Hilsman, Roger, Jr., Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research until April 25, 1963; thereafter Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs

Ho Chi Minh, President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam; also Chairman and General Secretary of Dang Lao Dong, Workers' Party of Vietnam

Hoang Van Lac, Colonel, ARVN, Permanent Commissioner, Interministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets; Special Commissioner for Strategic Hamlet Program

Hughes, Thomas L., Deputy Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research until April 28, 1963; thereafter Director

Huynh Van Cao, Brigadier General, ARVN, IV Corps Commander

Imhof, Johannes, Office of Western European Affairs, Department of State

Janow, Seymour J., Assistant Administrator for the Far East, Agency for International Development

Johnson, Lyndon B., Vice President until November 22, 1963; thereafter President

Johnson, U. Alexis, Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs

Jorden, William, Special Assistant to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs

Kattenburg, Paul M., Deputy Director of the Office of Southeast Asian Affairs, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State, and Chairman of the Vietnam Interdepartmental Working Group from August 4, 1963

Kaysen, Carl, President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs

Kennedy, John F., President of the United States until November 22, 1963

Kennedy, Robert E., Attorney General

Kent, Colonel J. R., USA, Assistant Director, Far East Region, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

Khanh, see Nguyen Khanh

Khiem, see Tran Thien Khiem

Khiet, see Tien Khiet

Khong, see Nguyen Khuong

Kim, see Le Van Kim

Koren, Henry L. T., Director of the Office of Southeast Asian Affairs,
Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State

Krulak, Major General Victor H., USMC, Special Assistant for
Counterinsurgency and Special Activities, Joint Staff of the Joint Chiefs
of Staff

Ky, see Nguyen Cao Ky

La, see Nguyen Van La

Lac, see Hoang Van Lac

Lalouette, Roger, French Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam

Lansdale, Maj. Gen. Edward G., USAF, Assistant to the Secretary of
Defense

Lausche, Frank, Democratic Senator from Ohio and Chairman of the
Far Eastern Subcommittee, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Le Quang Trieu, Special Forces Commander after November 1, 1963

Le Quang Tung, Colonel, ARVN, Special Forces Commander until
November 1, 1963

Le Van Kim, Brigadier General, (after November 1, 1963, Major
General), ARVN, Secretary General and Foreign Affairs member,
Executive Committee of the Military Revolutionary Council, after
November 1, 1963

Le Van Nghiem, Brigadier General, ARVN, Commander, I Corps

Lippmann, Walter, columnist

Lodge, Henry Cabot, Jr., Ambassador to South Vietnam from August
26, 1963

Luong, see Bui Van Luong

Mai Huu Xuan, Brigadier General, (after November 1963, Major
General), ARVN, Commander, Quang training camp; member,
Executive Committee of the Military Revolutionary Council, after
November 1, 1963; Chief of National Police

Maneli, Mieczyslaw, Polish member of the International Control
Commission

Manning, Robert 1., Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs

Mansfield, Mike, Democratic Senator from Montana; Majority Leader
and member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Mau, see Vu Van Mau

McCone, John A., Director of Central Intelligence

McNamara, Robert S., Secretary of Defense

Mecklin, John, Counselor for Public Affairs at the Embassy in Vietnam

Mendenhall, Joseph A., United Nations Adviser, Bureau of Far Eastern
Affairs, Department of State, from June 23, 1963

Minh, see Duong Van Minh

Montgomery, James M., Office of Southeast Asian Affairs, Bureau of
Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State, and member of the Vietnam

Working Group

Morse, Wayne, Democratic Senator from Oregon and member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Murrow, Edward R., Director, United States Information Agency

Nes, David G., Deputy Chief of Mission in Saigon from December 1963

Nghiem, see Le Van Nghiem

Ngo Dinh Can, brother of President Diem

Ngo Dinh Diem, President of the Republic of Vietnam until November 1, 1963

Ngo Dinh Luyen, brother of President Diem; Ambassador of the Republic of Vietnam to the United Kingdom until November 2, 1963

Ngo Dinh Nhu, brother of President Diem; Presidential Counselor and Head of the Interministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets until November 1, 1963

Ngo Dinh Nhu, Madame (Tran Le Xuan), wife of Ngo Dinh Nhu and member of the Vietnamese National Assembly; official hostess for President Diem

Ngo Dinh Thuc, brother of President Diem; Archbishop of Hue

Ngo Trong Hieu, Vietnamese Minister of Civic Action until November 1, 1963

Nguyen Cao Ky, Lieutenant Colonel, Vietnamese Air Force, Transport Squadron Commander; Air Force Commander from December 17, 1963

Nguyen Dinh Thuan, Vietnamese Secretary of State at the Presidency and Assistant Secretary of State for National Defense

Nguyen Khanh, Major General, ARVN, Commander of II Corps until November 29 1963; thereafter Commander of IV Corps

Nguyen Khuong, Colonel, ARVN, coup leader

Nguyen Luong, Vietnamese Minister of Finance

Nguyen Ngoc Tho, Vietnamese Vice President until November 4, 1963; thereafter Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and National Economy of the Provisional Government

Nguyen Van La, Major General, ARVN, Civil Guard Commander

Nguyen Van Thieu, Colonel, (Brigadier General after November 1, 1963), ARVN, Commanding Of 9cer of the 5th Infantry Division

Nhu, see Ngo Dinh Nhu

Nhu, Madame, see Ngo Dinh Nhu, Madame

Nolting, Frederick E., Jr., Ambassador to Vietnam until August 15, 1963

Pham Dang Lam, Secretary General of the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry until November 4, 1963; thereafter Foreign Minister in the Provisional Government

Pham Van Dong, Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam

Phan Huy Quat, former Vietnamese Defense Minister under Bao Dai and leader of Dai Viet Party

Phillips, Rufus C., Assistant Director for Rural Affairs, Operations Mission in Vietnam

Reston, James, syndicated columnist

Rice, Edward E., Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs

Richardson, John H., Chief of Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon until October 5, 1963

Rostow, Walt W., Counselor of the Department of State and Chairman of the Policy Planning Council

Rusk, Dean, Secretary of State

Salinger, Pierre E. G., President's Press Secretary

Schlesinger, Arthur, Jr., President's Special Assistant

Sheehan, Neil, United Press International correspondent in Vietnam

Sihanouk, Prince Norodom, Cambodian Chief of State

Smith, Bromley, Executive Secretary of the National Security Council

Souvanna Phouma, Laotian Prime Minister

Stevenson, Adlai Representative at the United Nations

Stilwell, Major General Richard G., USA, Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, from April 1963

Stoneman, Walter G., Director of the Office of Vietnam Affairs, Bureau for the Far East/Vietnam, Agency for International Development

Sullivan, William H., U.N. Adviser, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State, until April 28, 1963; thereafter Assistant to the Under Secretary of State

Sylvester, Arthur, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs

Tam Chau, bonze, member of Buddhist delegation from Hue; became Chairman of the Intersect Committee for the Defense of Buddhism

Taylor, General Maxwell D., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Tho, see Nguyen Ngoc Tho

Thompson, Brigadier Robert G. K., head of the British Advisory Mission in Vietnam

Thuan, see Nguyen Dinh Thuan

Thuc, see Ngo Dinh Thuc

Timmes, Major General Charles, Chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam

Tinh Khiat, chief bonze in Hue

Ton That Dinh, Major General, ARVN, Military Governor of Saigon, August 21-November 1, 1963; thereafter Commander of III Corps, Second Deputy Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Military Revolutionary Council, and Minister of Public Security of the Provisional Government

Tran Kim Tuyen, head of the Service des Etudes Politiques et Sociales
Tran Le Quang, Vietnamese Minister of Rural Affairs until November 4, 1963; thereafter Minister of Rural Affairs of the Provisional Government
Tran Le Xuan, see Ngo Dinh Nhu, Madame
Tran Thien Khiem, **General**, ARVN, Chief of Staff after November 1, 1963, Military Affairs member, Executive Committee of the Military Revolutionary Council
Tran Tu Oai **Brigadier General**, ARVN, Director of Psychological Warfare, Vietnamese Ministry of Defense; Chief of Public Information; Minister of Information in the Provisional Government after November 4, 1963
Tran Van Chuong, Vietnamese Ambassador to the United States until August 22, 1963
Tran Van Don, **Major General**, ARVN, Commander of III Corps until July 1963; thereafter Commander of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam; Acting Chief of the Joint General Staff after August 1963; First Deputy Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Military Revolutionary Council after November 1, 1963; Minister of National Defense after November 4, 1963
Tri Quang, bonze, Buddhist opposition leader
Trueheart, **William C.**, Minister-Counselor and Deputy Chief of Mission in Vietnam
Tung, see Le Quang Tung
Tuyen, see Tran Kim Tuyen
Unna Warren, *Washington Post* correspondent
Vu Van Mau, Vietnamese Foreign Minister until August 22, 1963; Ambassador to the United Kingdom after December 24, 1963
Wheeler, **General Earle G.**, USA, Chief of Staff
Xuan, see Mai Huu Xuan
Zablocki, **Clement J.**, Democratic Representative from Wisconsin and member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee

Vietnam

[367. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, December 16, 1963—7:25 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Confidential; Immediate. Drafted by Conlon, cleared by Harriman, and approved by Hilsman. Repeated to Paris for Rusk and to CINCPAC for POLAD.

[368. Central Intelligence Agency Information Report](#)

Washington, December 16, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Memos. Secret, Routine No Foreign Dissem/No Dissem Abroad/Controlled Dissem Background Use Only. A note on the source text indicates this information was acquired in Saigon December 8-14. Forrestal sent this report to Bundy under cover of a memorandum, December 17 which reads as follows: "The attached is as good a wrap-up on the Vietnam situation as I have seen in the last few days. The President might be interested." Also published in Declassified Documents, 1975, 57B.

[369. Report on the Situation in Long An Province](#)

Saigon, December 20, 1963.

Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-1-3470, 12/19-12/20/63, SVN Visit. Confidential. Authorship of this report is not given, but a note in Lodge's handwriting on the source text reads: "By an intelligent American who recently visited Long An and doesn't want to sign his name." It was handed to McNamara in Saigon by Lodge.

370. Memorandum of Conversation

Saigon, December 20, 1963—3:45 p.m.

Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-4370, 12/19-12/20/63 SVN Visit. Secret; Limited Distribution. Presumably drafted by Lodge who signed it. Sent to Washington in telegraphic form in telegram 1192 from Saigon, December 20. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 7 US/MCNAMARA)

371. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) to the Secretary of State

Washington, December 20, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, POL 1 General Political. Secret. Drafted by Joseph W. Neubert, Koren, Conlon, and Montgomery and signed by Hilsman. A note on the source text indicates that Rusk saw this memorandum.

372. Report by the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (Krulak)

Washington, December 21, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam. Secret. Hilsman wrote the following note on a cover sheet: "This is Brute Krulak's report, probably TS."

373. Memorandum for the Record by the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' Special Assistant (Sullivan)

Washington, December 21, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam. Top Secret. A note on the source text indicates this was Hilsman's personal copy.

[374. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense \(McNamara\) to President Johnson](#)

Washington, December 21, 1963.

Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, South Vietnam, McNamara Statement. Secret. The signed original is in the Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Memos and Misc. Also printed in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, Vol. 11, pp. 494-496.

[375. Letter From the Director of Central Intelligence \(McCone\) to President Johnson](#)

Washington, December 23, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Memos and Misc. Secret.

[376. Editorial Note](#)

[377. Letter From the Ambassador in Laos \(Unger\) to the Secretary of Defense \(McNamara\)](#)

Vientiane, December 26, 1963.

Source: Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 69-A-3131, Vietnam 381. Secret. A note on the source text indicates that McNamara saw this letter.

[378. Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' Special Assistant \(Jorden\) to the Under Secretary \(Harriman\)](#)

Washington, December 27, 1963.

Source: Department of State, S/P Files: Lot 70 D 199, Vietnam 1963.
Confidential.

[379. Message From President Johnson to the Ambassador in Vietnam \(Lodge\)](#)

Washington, December 30, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Heads of State Correspondence, General Minh Corres. Secret; Eyes Only. Transmitted to Saigon eyes only for Ambassador Lodge in telegram CAP 63663, which is the source text. The telegram was sent to the LBJ Ranch on December 30 for approval. (Draft telegram from Bundy to the President; *ibid.*)

[380. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, December 31, 1963—12:34 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret Flash. Drafted by James M. Montgomery of the Vietnam Working Group, cleared by Forrestal, and approved by Hilsman. A draft of the letter to Minh, a draft of the oral presentation, and a covering memorandum from Rusk to the President were prepared by Mendenhall on December 26. Rusk took the drafts and the memorandum to the LBJ Ranch in Texas on December 27 where the President approved them. Rusk's memorandum to the President reads in part as follows: "As a follow-up to Secretary McNamara's visit to Viet-Nam, we recommend a Presidential message to General Duong Van Minh, Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council in Viet-Nam, stressing the urgency of action to reverse the adverse trend in the war as well as reaffirming the United States policy of complete support for the Vietnamese Government. At the same time public uneasiness and confusion in both the United States and Viet-Nam necessitate a highly authoritative statement of United States war aims, intentions regarding the withdrawal of military personnel, and policy on neutralization." (*Ibid.*) To meet these two purposes, the

memorandum recommended the letter to General Minh and a "supplementary message" to be delivered orally by Lodge.

[381. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, December 31, 1963, noon.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET. Confidential; Limit Distribution. Repeated to CINCPAC.

[382. Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' Special Assistant \(Sullivan\) to the Under Secretary \(Harriman\)](#)

Washington, December 31, 1963.

Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Vietnam-Policy. Secret. William A. Harbin, Harriman's Staff Assistant, wrote the following note on the source text for Sullivan: "Gov thinks this very good, asks if we should do anything about it now, or just file it?" Sullivan indicated that it should be filed.

[383. Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' Special Assistant \(Jorden\) to the Under Secretary \(Harriman\)](#)

Washington, December 31, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, POL 1, General Political. Secret. A note on the source text indicates that it was Hilsman's copy. Hilsman in turn sent it to the Vietnam Working Group for action.

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1. Memorandum of Conference With the President

Washington, August 28, 1963, noon.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Bromley Smith. The meeting was held at the White House. There are two other records of this meeting: a memorandum of conversation by Hilsman, August 28 (ibid., Hilsman Papers, Country Series—Vietnam, State memcons) and a memorandum for the record by Krulak, August 28 (National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Vietnam, chap. XXIII).

2. Editorial Note

3. The President's Intelligence Checklist

Washington, August 28, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Chester V. Clifton Series. Top Secret; Eyes Only for the President. A note on the source text by Clifton indicates that the President read the checklist.

4. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)

Saigon, August 29, 1963—12:20 a.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to Felt, to Bundy at the White House (where it was received at 2:43 p.m., August 28), to Rusk, Ball, and Harriman at the Department of State, and to McCone at CIA.

5. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)

Washington, August 28, 1963—5:16 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Phyllis D. Bernau.

6. Memorandum of Conversation

Washington, August 28, 1963, 6 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam, White House Meetings, State memcons. Top Secret; Eyes Only; No Distribution. Drafted by Hilsman. The meeting was held at the White House. There are two other records of this meeting: a memorandum of conference by Bromley Smith, August 28 (ibid., National Security File, Meetings and Memoranda, Meetings on Vietnam) and a memorandum for the record by Krulak, August 28 (National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Vietnam, chap. XXIII).

7. Telegram From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) to the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins)

Washington, August 28, 1963—8:36 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only; Operational Immediate. Also sent to Lodge, Felt, McNamara, Gilpatric, McGeorge Bundy, Rusk, Ball,

Hilsman, Harriman, Helms, and each of the Joint Chiefs. Hilsman refers to this telegram in *To Move a Nation*, p. 493.

8. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, August 28, 1963—9:32 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Emergency. Repeated to CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Felt. The text of this telegram was sent from the White House for transmission over Department of State channels. It was cleared by Rusk and Hilsman.

9. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, August 28, 1963—9:33 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Top Secret; Emergency. The text of this message was sent from the White House for transmission over Department of State channels. It was cleared personally by Rusk and Hilsman.

10. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, August 29, 1963, 1 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution. Received at 3:17 a.m. and passed to the White House, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and CIA.

11. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, August 29, 1963, 4 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Top Secret; Emergency. Received at 4:42 a.m. and passed to the White House at 4:52 a.m.

12. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, August 29, 1963, 6 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Emergency; Eyes Only. Repeated Operational Immediate to CINCPAC. Received at 7:03 a.m. and passed to the White House, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and CIA. Printed also in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, vol. 11, pp. 738-739 and Declassified Documents 1982, 591 B.

13. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)

Saigon, August 29, 1963—5:30 p.m.

Source: National Defense University; Taylor Papers, T-172-63. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to CINCPAC for Felt.

14. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the President and the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, August 29, 1963—10:10 a.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series—Vietnam. Secret; Limit Distribution. Prepared in the Department of State.

15. Memorandum of Conference With the President

Washington, August 29, 1963, noon.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. The meeting was held at the White House. There are two other records of this meeting: a memorandum of conversation by Hilsman, August 29 (ibid., Hilsman Papers, White House Meetings, State memcons) and a memorandum for the record by Krulak, August 29 (National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-172-69).

16. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, August 29, 1963—5:03 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Emergency. The text of this message was sent from the White House for transmission over Department of State channels. According to the memorandum supra, the telegram was cleared by the President. Hilsman and Rusk cleared the telegram for transmission. Another copy indicates that the President saw it. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State cables) Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, p. 538.

17. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, August 29, 1963—8:17 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Emergency. Drafted by Rusk, cleared with the White House, and approved by Hilsman. Another copy of this telegram has a marginal note indicating the President read it. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables) Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, p. 539.

18. Message From the President to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)

Washington, August 29, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Staff Memorandum, MG Bundy. Transmitted in telegram CAP 63465 with the notations: "Personal for the Ambassador from the President" and "No Department or other distribution whatever". The source text is a copy that Bundy sent to Clifton under cover of a Top Secret Eyes Only memorandum of August 30, which reads as follows: "The enclosed envelope should be opened by the President only, and when he has read the messages it contains you should destroy them. The reason for this extraordinary procedure is that these messages are not in the normal series and their existence is not known except to the President and to the Secretary of State, so I do not want them in a message file that may be seen by others who believe themselves privy to the most classified material. You should tell the President, however, that I discussed the outgoing message in draft with the Secretaries of State and Defense who concurred in it. The Secretary of Defense in particular thought it was a wise and necessary cable. "You may wish to ask the President after he has read the messages whether he wants to send any further message to the Ambassador on this topic. My own advice is not to do so at this time, but to be ready to call his attention to this question again if the developing situation makes it advisable. "I am sorry to be so cryptic." The other message included in the envelope for the President was Lodge's reply; see footnote 2 below.

19. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency

Saigon, August 30, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Operational Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy the CIA sent to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy, and to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 4:45 a.m.

20. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, August 30, 1963, 6 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Top Secret; Emergency. Received at 7:39 p.m. Repeated Operational Immediate to CINCPAC. According to CAP 63468, August 30, the President read this cable. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables) Also printed in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, Vol. II, pp. 739-740.

21. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency to the Station in Saigon

Washington, August 30, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy the CIA sent the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 1:58 p.m. According to CAP 63468, August 30, the President read this cable. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables)

22. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency

Saigon, August 30, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Operational Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy the CIA sent the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 1:59 p.m.

23. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency

Saigon, August 30, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret; Operational Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy the CIA sent the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak.

24. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) to the President

Washington, August 30, 1963.

Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-172-69. Top Secret. There is no indication on the source text that the President saw this memorandum or chart. A copy of the chart is in the Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous.

25. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) to the Secretary of State

Washington, August 30, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Top Secret. Drafted by Mendenhall and cleared in draft by Allen S. Whiting, Director of the Office of Research and Analysis for the Far East, Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

26. Memorandum of Conversation

Washington, August 30, 1963—2:30 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam, White House Meetings, State memcons. Top Secret; Eyes Only; No Distribution. Drafted by Hilsman. The meeting was held at the Department of State. There are two other records of this meeting: a memorandum of discussion by Bromley Smith, August 29 (ibid., National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda, Meetings on Vietnam) and a memorandum for the record by Krulak, August 30 (National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-172-69).

27. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, August 30, 1963, 7 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET. Secret; Eyes Only; Limit Distribution. Received at 3:16 p.m. Repeated to CINCPAC and passed by the Department of State to the White House, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the CIA.

28. Memorandum of a Conversation

Washington, August 30, 1963, 5 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET. Secret. Drafted by Imhof. The meeting was held at the Department of State.

29. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)

Washington, August 30, 1963—6:08 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Phyllis D. Bernau.

30. Memorandum From the Director of the Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff (Riley) to the President

Washington, August 30, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Files, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret. A note on the source text indicates that this memorandum was taken from the President's Reading File, dated August 31.

31. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, August 30, 1963—8:30 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Emergency. Drafted by Rusk and cleared with Hilsman, Krulak, and Forrestal. Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD exclusive for Felt.

32. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency

Saigon, August 31, 1963—2:39 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Eyes Only; Operational Immediate. The source text is a copy the CIA sent to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 4:47 a.m.

33. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)

Saigon, August 31, 1963—1:45 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to CINCPAC exclusive for Felt. A note on the source text indicates the President read this telegram. The source text is a copy Krulak sent to the White House for Bundy; Krulak also sent copies to the Department of State for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman; to CIA for Helms; to the Army for General Wheeler; to the Navy for Admiral MacDonald; and to the Marine Corps for General Shoup. A summary version of this cable is printed in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, vol. 11, pp. 740-741.

[34. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, August 31, 1963, 6 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Operational Immediate. Received at 7:16 a.m. Repeated Operational Immediate to CINCPAC. Relayed by the Department of State to the White House, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the CIA. Another copy of this telegram has a marginal note indicating that the President saw it. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables)

[35. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs \(Bundy\)](#)

Washington, August 31, 1963—9:55 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Mildred Asbjornson.

[36. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs \(Harriman\)](#)

Washington, August 31, 1963—10:15 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Mildred Asbjornson.

37. Memorandum of Conversation

Washington, August 31, 1963, 11 a.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, White House Meetings, State Memcons. Top Secret; Eyes Only; No Distribution. Drafted by Hilsman. The meeting was held at the Department of State. Krulak's memorandum of this meeting is printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, pp. 540-544. A brief memorandum of discussion of this meeting by Bromley Smith is in Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda, Meetings on Vietnam.

38. Memorandum of Conversation Between the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)

Washington, August 31, 1963, noon.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries, Vietnam. Top Secret, Eyes Only; No Distribution. Hilsman wrote "post mortem" on the first page of the source text. He also attached two pages of fragmentary handwritten notes which are neither decipherable nor comprehensible. They are not printed.

39. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, August 31, 1963—10:48 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Emergency. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared with Forrestal and in draft with Rusk. Repeated to CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Felt.

40. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Saigon, August 31, 1963—10:49 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Emergency; Eyes Only. Drafted by Rusk and approved by Hilsman. Repeated to CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Felt.

41. Memorandum From the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hughes) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, August 31, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam. Top Secret.

42. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, September 1, 1963, 7 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 8:37 a.m. and passed to the White House, CIA, and Department of Defense at 9:01 a.m. On another copy of this telegram there is an indication that the President read it. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables, Part I)

43. Telegram From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President, at Hyannis Port, Massachusetts

Washington, September 1, 1963—2:05 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret; Eyes Only. Sent to Clifton and Salinger for the President. A note on the source text indicates that Salinger delivered it to the President.

[44. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, September 2, 1963, 10 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Received at 10:59 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed by the Department of State to the White House, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and CIA. On another copy of this telegram a note indicates that the President read it. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables, Part I) According to an attached note by Mildred Asbjornson, September 2, General Carter of the CIA called the Secretary and "urged that no hasty action be taken on this message; that it be discussed in depth at least at the EXCOM level. He said that McCone would be back tonight."

[45. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of Defense \(McNamara\) and the Secretary of State](#)

Washington, September 2, 1963—11:28 a.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam, 8/29/63.

[46. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency](#)

Saigon, September 2, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. The source text is a copy sent by the CIA to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were

also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 1:01 p.m.

[47. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency](#)

Saigon, September 2, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy sent by the CIA to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were sent also to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 1:02 p.m.

[48. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency](#)

Saigon, September 2, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy sent by the CIA to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 1:02 p.m.

[49. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency](#)

Saigon, September 2, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy sent by the CIA to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 7:24 p.m.

50. Interview With the President

Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, September 2, 1963.

Source: Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John E Kennedy, 1963, pp. 650-653. This interview was videotaped at Hyannis Port on the morning of September 2 and broadcast that evening on the CBS television network.

51. Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President

Washington, September 2, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret. A note on the source text indicates that the President read this memorandum and another note in Clifton's hand states: "Bundy ready to talk on the phone." No record of the President's conversation with Bundy has been found.

52. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, September 3, 1963—10:45 a.m.

Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Dolores R Perruso of Harriman's staff.

53. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) to the President

Washington, undated.

Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Vietnam, chap. XXIII. Secret. The source text bears a notation that Taylor handcarried the memorandum to the President. Taylor among others saw the President on September 3 for the noon meeting on Vietnam; see Document 54. The signed original of this memorandum is in the Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Vietnam, Security, 1963.

54. Memorandum of Conference With the President

Washington, September 3, 1963, noon.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. The meeting was held at the White House. Also published in Declassified Documents, 1982, 649A. A memorandum for the record of this meeting by Krulak is in the National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Vietnam, chap. XXIII.

55. Memorandum of Telephone Conversations Between the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs (Manning) and the President

Washington, September 3, 1963, 4:35 and 4:45 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries, Series—Vietnam. Confidential. Drafted by Manning.

56. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, September 3, 1963—9:35 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared in draft by Rusk, Forrestal, McNamara, and Taylor. Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD exclusive for Felt. An earlier draft is attached to Document 51. Regarding the preparation of this cable, see Document 54.

[57. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, September 3, 1963—9:36 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared in draft by Rusk and Forrestal.

[58. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, September 4, 1963—8 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Received at 11:10 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House, CIA, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

[59. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, September 4, 1963—8:48 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared by Rusk, Harriman, and Bundy. Repeated to CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Felt.

[60. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, September 5, 1963, 3 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Received at 5:05 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House, CIA, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

[61. Draft Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs \(Hilsman\) and the President](#)

Washington, September 5, 1963—8:55 a.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam. This memorandum apparently was transcribed by a staff member in Hilsman's office.

[62. Editorial Note](#)

[63. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, September 5, 1963—8:42 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Secret; Priority. Drafted by James C. Thomson, Special Assistant, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs; cleared in draft with John R White, Legislative Officer, Bureau of Congressional Relations; and approved by Hilsman.

[64. Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs \(Harriman\) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs \(Bundy\)](#)

Washington, September 5, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Confidential. Harriman also sent a copy of the attached letter to McNamara under cover of a similar memorandum. Harriman suggested to McNamara that the opinions in the letter represent "judgments which cannot be ignored." (Washington National Records center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 69 A 3131, Vietnam 091)

65. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) and the President

Washington, September 6, 1963—9:15 a.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries, Vietnam, 8/29/63. Transcribed by Mabel Karydakis of Hilsman's office.

66. Memorandum of Conference With the President

Washington, September 6, 1963—10:30 a.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Bromley Smith. The meeting was held in the White House. Also published in Declassified Documents, 1982, 649B. A memorandum of discussion at the meeting by Hilsman is in the Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam, White House Meetings, State Memcons.

67. Editorial Note

68. Memorandum From the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hughes) to the Secretary of State

Washington, September 6, 1963.

Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Vietnam-Policy. Secret; Limit Distribution; No Foreign Dissem/No Dissem Abroad/Background Use Only. Drafted by Allen S. Whiting, Director of the Office of Research and Analysis for the Far East, and Leo G. Sarris of that office.

69. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency

Saigon, September 6, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy sent by the CIA to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. There is no time of transmission from Saigon on the source text, but it was received at the Department of State at 7:15 p.m.

70. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, September 6, 1963—7:42 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared in draft with Bundy, Rusk, and Harriman. Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD exclusive for Felt. A copy was also sent to the President at Hyannis Port. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cable 11) Also published in Declassified Documents, 1982, 592 B.

71. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, September 6, 1963—7:43 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 VIET-US. Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Koren and Hilsman.

72. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, September 7, 1963, 2 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Received at 3:02 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House and CIA.

1. Memorandum of Conference With the President²

Washington, August 28, 1963, noon.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

OTHERS PRESENT

Vice President (late), Secretary McNamara, Under Secretary Ball, Secretary Dillon, Attorney General, General Carter, General Taylor, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric, Under Secretary Harriman, Ambassador Nolting, General Krulak, Director Murrow, Mr. Helms, Assistant Secretary Hilsman, Mr. Colby (CIA), Mr. Bundy, General Clifton, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Bromley Smith

The meeting began with a briefing by Mr. Colby who read an extract from the situation report cabled from Saigon by the CIA staff chief.³ Mr. Colby said we had tried to clear up the confusion caused by a telegram sent commercially from an unknown person in Laguna Beach, California, to Ambassador Lodge in Saigon urging him to try to overthrow Diem. Reports had reached Washington to the effect that Diem thought this message was an instruction from the President to Lodge.⁴

General Taylor reported on the U.S. forces in the area available to evacuate Americans in Vietnam, if required. He said 3000 to 4000 evacuees could be airlifted by U.S. forces now in Vietnam. Other U.S. forces are being moved closer to Saigon so that they can respond more quickly and move a larger number of people. Ambassador Lodge has expressed his concern that the airlift capability is inadequate. Admiral Felt is engaged now in figuring out ways of increasing the number of Americans who could be removed from dangerous areas promptly in an emergency. The airlift in Vietnam outside of Saigon is substantial. In response to a question, General Taylor said there were over 4000 Americans in Saigon, excluding the military.⁵

General Taylor said that Vietnamese forces loyal to Diem in the Saigon area outnumbered two to one the forces we believed would follow rebel generals in the event of a coup. Outside of Saigon, the forces controlled by generals who might rebel outnumbered Diem's forces. He concluded that in the long run the forces controlled by rebel generals would outnumber forces which would remain loyal to Diem. He cautioned that a head count of troops was not all-important because a small number of

tough units could control the situation even though outnumbered by less well-trained forces.

Mr. Hilsman said that General Dinh is the key to the situation. [*1 sentence (1½ lines) not declassified*]

Ambassador Nolting said that, as he pointed out yesterday, he believed that Diem and Nhu knew of our activity with the generals.

Mr. Ball reported that Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins had suggested that we or they leak to the press the movement of the 7th Fleet to a position off Saigon. The President doubted this suggestion should be approved because our fleet movement would appear to be such obvious evidence of an intention of the U.S. to intervene militarily in Vietnam.

Secretary McNamara stated that he believed we should decide first whether we are backing the Vietnamese generals in their effort to overthrow Diem. If we are, then we should plan how to induce doubtful generals to defect. In his view, events have almost pulled us along in the last twenty-four hours.

Mr. Ball said that it would be difficult if not impossible for us to live with a situation in which Nhu was ascendant in Vietnam. He believed we had no option but to back a coup. We are already beyond the point of no return. The question is how do we make this coup effort successful.

Mr. McNamara said he believed that we should not proceed as if we were being pushed. If we decided to back a coup we should go in to win. The cables he had read from Saigon raised doubt in his mind that the coup generals could overthrow Diem. At least initially, forces loyal to Diem can overpower forces opposing him.

The President noted that both Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins had recommended that we go ahead. He did not believe we should take the position that we have to go ahead because we have gone so far already. If a coup is not in the cards, we could unload. The generals talking about a coup did not appear to be very enthusiastic.

Mr. Bundy commented on the consequences of backing off vs. the consequences of going forward. He believed we should decide today what we should do to defect the generals. Every time we act to help the

rebel generals we reduce our freedom to choose between going ahead or breaking off efforts to overthrow Diem.

Mr. Ball said that one major change which we could make would be to instruct our military officers to talk to the generals. Up to this point, we had had no contact with the coup generals except through CIA officials. Until our military officers contact the generals, several generals who we now consider doubtful would not shift to supporting the group planning to overthrow Diem.

The President commented that we had asked General Harkins twice if he approved of our going ahead in support of a coup. Both Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins say we should support the rebel generals.

In response to the President's question, Ambassador Nolting said he was surprised when he learned that General Harkins favored our supporting a coup. Further encouragement to the generals opposing Diem runs counter to our agreement on continuing economic assistance which we reached with Diem some time ago. Diem foresaw at that time a disagreement with the U.S. about how they were running the internal affairs of Vietnam. Nolting said he had grave reservations about proceeding against Diem. The good faith of the U.S. is involved. In addition, he had given personal commitments to Diem which were based on instructions sent to him from Washington when he was Ambassador. We should not support a coup in the expectation that we can get another government which we can deal with and a base on which we can win the war against the Viet Cong. Supporting a coup is bad in principle and sets a bad precedent. The alternatives he saw are three:

1. To decide to support the coup generals and help them line up a preponderance of force so that there would be a quick takeover.
2. Back off from contacts already made with dissident generals, which he admitted would be difficult to do.
3. Leave the dissident generals alone and, if they have the guts to attempt a coup, support them at that time.

Mr. Bundy called attention to the difference between gaining operational control of a coup and the present situation in which we are merely telling the generals that we understand how they feel about Diem and that we can't live with the Nhus.

Mr. Hilsman said there were some things we could do in which the U.S. hand would not show.

Mr. Ball, commenting on Ambassador Nolting's statement, said Diem had broken promises he had made to us. The actions they are taking are in violation of good faith. He was not sympathetic to the allegation that we were breaking commitments. He cited reports which indicate that Diem and his followers are taking anti-American actions. He saw the situation as follows:

1. We can't win the war against the Communists with Diem in control. The U.S. position in the eyes of the world is being badly damaged. Hence, we can't back off from our all-out opposition to Diem and Nhu.
2. If we merely let the generals proceed and then, if they fail to overthrow Diem, we have lost as well. This outcome is half-baked and no good.
3. We decide to do the job right. There is no other acceptable alternative. We must decide now to go through to a successful overthrow of Diem.

Mr. Harriman stated his agreement with the position expressed by Mr. Ball.

Secretary Dillon commented that if anything starts it will be labeled as a U.S. show from the very beginning. If we decide to back the rebel generals we must do whatever is required to be certain they succeed in overthrowing Diem.

The President said we should decide what we can do here or suggest things that can be done in the field which would maximize the chances of the rebel generals. We should ask Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins how we can build up military forces which would carry out a coup. At present, it does not look as if the coup forces could defeat Diem.

Secretary Dillon interrupted to say, "Then don't go."

The President asked the Defense Department to come up with ways of building up the anti-Diem forces in Saigon.

Mr. Hilsman said that Ambassador Lodge was asking standby authority:

1. To suspend all economic aid to the Diem government, but continue aid by giving it directly to the generals.
2. To suspend all U.S. operations in Vietnam.
3. To assist the coup generals by making U.S. military equipment available to them.

4. To make a public announcement that the U.S. was supporting the forces trying to overthrow Diem.

Secretary McNamara thought we should tell Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins:

1. Don't let a coup start if they think it can't win because we can't live with Diem if a coup attempt is made and the coup fails. He questions whether, on the basis of the forces now available to the rebel generals, a coup can succeed.
2. We need a list of actions which would be of help to the coup generals, such as ways of gaining support from now doubtful generals and the movement of U.S. fleet units.⁶

Mr. Bundy commented that most generals favor a coup and pointed out that the U.S. controls all military assistance being given to Diem.

Mr. Harriman said that we have lost Vietnam if the coup fails. He believes we cannot win the war with the Nhus. We have lost the fight in Vietnam and must withdraw if a coup does not take place. We put Diem in power and he has double-crossed us. Diem and his followers have betrayed us. He favored removing Nhu and felt that it was a mistake that we had not acted a long time ago. We had made a mistake in working with Nhu on the strategic hamlet plan.

Mr. Hilsman said that we can't stop the generals now and that they must go forward or die. He agreed that we cannot win the war unless Diem is removed.

In response to the President's question, Mr. Harriman said we had been winning the war with Diem because the generals were with him. The generals are defecting now because of the recent actions which Diem had taken against the Buddhists. In the present situation, the opposition to Diem can be rallied.

The President thought we should go back to Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins again, telling them that counting up the forces favoring Diem and the forces opposing Diem, it was clear that Diem held the balance of power.

Mr. Bundy said our request of Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins should be specific in that we should ask them how they evaluate the pro-Diem and anti-Diem forces. He noted that both Ambassador Lodge

and General Harkins counted heavily on the caliber of the various troops.

The Attorney General expressed his concern as to whether we knew what we would do if Diem acted to destroy the coup before the generals were ready to pull it off. He noted that some people thought Diem knew already of the coup plans. Diem would know that if the coup were successful he would be finished. and, therefore, he would obviously try to break up a coup by arresting the generals before they were ready. He thought we should figure out how we could offset any action of Diem to destroy the forces opposing him.

Ambassador Nolting asked what condition Vietnam would be in if a coup is successful. He was not clear whether the resulting government would bring about stable leadership or whether the rebelling generals would be unable to agree on who should be the leader.

Mr. Hilsman said the generals could put the Vice President of Vietnam in power and govern the country the way the generals have in Korea. He acknowledged that we have little information about how the generals plan to run the country if they are successful. He expressed his strong view that Diem and Nhu would have to be exiled.

Ambassador Nolting said that only Diem can hold this fragmented country together.⁷ Possibly Diem could get Nhu and his wife to leave, but he doubted this would be possible. We should try once again to persuade Diem to remove Nhu and Madame Nhu. Ambassador Lodge had chosen not to try to do this for fear of exposing the coup generals to a sudden reaction by Diem if Diem refused to remove the Nhuses.

Governor Harriman stated his disagreement. The political situation in Vietnam will blow up sometime. We have in Vietnam a situation similar to that which existed in Korea under Syngman Rhee. The political forces in Vietnam will rally quickly against Diem.

Ambassador Nolting said that Nhu was not anti-American nor is Diem.

The President asked that the group adjourn now, to meet again at 6:00 PM.

Bromley Smith⁸

² Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Bromley Smith. The meeting was held at the White House. There are two other records of this meeting: a memorandum of conversation by Hilsman, August 28 (*ibid.*, Hilsman Papers, Country Series—Vietnam, State memcons) and a memorandum for the record by Krulak, August 28 (National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Vietnam, chap. XXIII).

³ Apparent reference to [vol. III, p. 671](#). .

⁴ See the editorial note, [infra](#).

⁵ Krulak's memorandum for the record is the most detailed of the three versions of this meeting. See [infra](#).

⁶ See the editorial note, [infra](#).

⁷ See the editorial note, [infra](#).

⁸ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

2. Editorial Note

Both Hilsman's memorandum of conversation and Krulak's memorandum for the record treat William E. Colby's briefing during the noon meeting with the President in greater detail (see [footnote 5, *Supra*](#)). Hilsman's account reads as follows:

"The meeting began with the CIA briefing-Saigon is quiet; military operations continue but at a lessened pace; photographs of Nhu have appeared on some public buildings, contrary to earlier information General Don is not in the hospital but at his post; the JGS statement assuming responsibility for martial law; and some GVN action to surface new Buddhist leaders, returning some Buddhists to their homes who have promised to be cooperative.

"On operations, Colby noted that the meeting with Big Minh would be at 8:15 p.m. Washington time today. Colby briefed the report on the Khiem meeting; on the forces as reported in cabled traffic and on the CIA Station's assessment of the situation [*document number not declassified*]. There was some discussion of the message intercepted by Tung from the crackpot in Laguna Beach. The Attorney General suggested that CIA should arrange for several more messages from the same person to thoroughly discredit the cable since Khiem apparently feels that President Diem believes that this is a genuine instruction." (Memorandum of conversation by Hilsman, August 28; Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam, State memcons) For text of the JGS statement, see *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1963*, pages 865-866. The CIA document from Saigon is printed in [volume III, page 671](#) .

Krulak's record of this part of the meeting reads as follows:

"Mr. Colby described the Saigon situation as generally unchanged, with minor troop movements in the Saigon area, relaxation of restrictions and some release of prisoners. In the hinterland there has been a slow drop in the offensive operations, but not dramatically so. The GVN released a statement by the Joint General Staff that the military did participate in the pagoda raids and the GVN seems to be actively engaged in generating favorable statements from the Buddhists.

"He described Ambassador Lodge's response to the State query regarding the situation and mentioned President Diem's dissatisfaction with a telegram that he had received from Laguna Beach, purportedly from President Kennedy, urging replacement of the Diem government. The President asked how this could be explained, to which Mr. Helms replied that the Station Chief could handle it easily.

"Mr. Colby discussed the matter of the balance of forces in the Saigon area, reciting the content of messages which all present had on the subject. He was emphatic in stating that the point of no return had been reached." (Memorandum for the record by Krulak, August 28; National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Vietnam, chap. XXIII)

Later in the meeting, evacuation planning was discussed; see [footnote 5, supra](#). Krulak's memorandum for the record reads as follows:

"General Taylor discussed the matter of military capabilities for protection and evacuation, referring to Ambassador Lodge's question as to the adequacy of US military forces in the region. He pointed out that the reaction time of the BLT task group offshore had been reduced from 48 to 24 hours; that the shipping involved could readily lift several thousand evacuees and the people could be moved much closer to the coast. He discussed the location of the CVA task group and stated that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had asked Admiral Felt what further changes are required in response to the concern expressed by Ambassador Lodge. General Taylor continued, noting that there were 4 BLTs on Okinawa on 24-hour alert; that C-130 aircraft were in the process of being assembled at Okinawa, and that all related plans were being reviewed.

"Mr. McNamara added that a most important asset is the helicopters and C-123s already in-country, which could be used to move refugees either into the countryside or to ships at sea. He commented that the US forces present in Vietnam are of neither the type nor the size which warranted consideration for participation in large scale fighting.

"The President raised the question of the Embassy evacuation plan, to which Ambassador Nolting replied that it had been

recently brought up to date and reorganized. General Taylor, from his notes, recited key parts of the plan.”

Regarding possible United States actions which might be of assistance to the “coup generals” (see [footnote 6, *supra*](#)), Hilsman's record included the following exchange between the President and Hilsman:

“The President asked Hilsman what ideas State had for swinging over the uncommitted generals, and Hilsman replied that we had a number of ideas including suitably discreet comments about the US attitude towards the Nhus to generals such as Dinh, the leaks about the presence of the Seventh Fleet and other US forces, [*line not declassified*] and that State intended to work out with Defense and CIA some suggestions along these lines.

“Hilsman also questioned the Secretary of Defense's assumption that we could prevent the coup from starting at this stage. He felt that, as we had said before in the meeting, Diem and Nhu were undoubtedly aware that coup plotting was going on and that the generals probably now had no alternative to going ahead except that of fleeing the country. The President said that he was not sure that we were in that deep. As he understood it, only two contacts by two CIA men had been made with two Vietnamese generals. This was a question we would have to look into if it was a judgment of the field that the coup would not work.”

At the end of the meeting Ambassador Nolting made a statement that “only Diem can hold this fragmented country together” (see [footnote 7, *supra*](#)). In Hilsman's record this statement and the subsequent disagreement between Nolting and Harriman are recorded as follows:

“Mr. Nolting again intervened saying that he profoundly felt that only Diem could hold this fragmented country together.

“The President said, ‘Even without the Nhus?’ Nolting replied that he thought President Diem could be persuaded to remove Madame Nhu from the scene and at least to make brother Nhu less conspicuous.

“Mr. Ball said emphatically that he disagreed with Mr. Nolting's estimate-that attempting to go along with Diem and Nhu spelled nothing but disaster.

"With some heat Mr. Harriman said that he had disagreed with Mr. Nolting from the beginning when he first assumed office as Assistant Secretary; that he felt he was profoundly wrong about this; and that he was sorry to have to be so blunt about saying this.

"Mr. Hilsman said that he wished to associate himself with Mr. Ball and Mr. Harriman; that he felt given the history of the past few days a Diem-Nhu government could not in the long run win. Furthermore, looking to the other countries in this area, he wanted to point out that the consequences of the US acquiescing in the continuation of Nhu in a commanding position and acceptance of the desecration of the temples would make our task more difficult through Asia. He thought the President would be interested to know that the Koreans had ordered a special study of US-South Viet-Nam relations in order to decide how much repression the US would tolerate, to serve as a guide for Korean actions in the upcoming elections."

3. The President's Intelligence Checklist¹

Washington, August 28, 1963.

1. South Vietnam

- A. Though some easing of martial law was evident in Saigon yesterday, steps were being taken to tighten the security ring around the Presidential Palace, which houses Diem and the Nhush.
- B. The Palace security guard, normally provided by an elite Army unit, is now, we hear, being drawn from units under Colonel Tung, the pro-regime commander of the Special Forces. In addition anti-aircraft guns have been emplaced in the Palace area.
- C. Meantime, the shadow of Ngo Dinh Nhu looms ever larger. His picture has begun to show up in public buildings—one report says Diem's is coming down—and a million posters of Nhu, resplendent in his Youth Corps uniform, have been made up for nationwide distribution.
- D. Some Army leaders fear that Nhu plans a further power grab.
- E. Military operations against the Viet Cong continue, but martial law commitments led to the suspension of a large-scale operation in central Vietnam and the number of small-scale government actions has declined.

[Here follow items unrelated to Vietnam.]

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Chester V. Clifton Series. Top Secret; Eyes Only for the President. A note on the source text by Clifton indicates that the President read the checklist.

4. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Saigon, August 29, 1963—12:20 a.m.

MAC 1557. Ref State 243,² which used my name in one or two instances, I certainly had impression that military had concurred. Also CINCPAC 250456Z³ indicated his opinion was incorporated in State 243 and that my support had been volunteered.

This led me to presume that there was indeed coordination at all levels. I too had second thoughts even when I saw State 243 in that it was a bit contradictory. On the one hand it gave Diem a chance yet at the same time it told military to go ahead. The Amb made decision after receiving approval of modification that his instructions were clear to go ahead on military side. This was done and [*document number not declassified*]⁴ reflects result of that decision. I have always been of opinion and have so stated in past few days that whatever we do it should be done with least bloodshed and with hopes that resultant relations between US and Vietnamese, regardless of which Vietnamese finally end up in control, should be on the same friendly cooperative basis that has been evidenced since I have been here the past year and a half.

I flatly refused to personally get involved unless I had approval from highest US authority—which I have not. On the other hand, presuming that State 243 and 256⁵ represented our government's position I had no choice but to go along. As you can see from my MACV 1544⁶ I thought I'd better check.

Now the die is cast though as yet we have not received the details of how it's to be done—and in the final analysis, in my opinion, it will not be accomplished unless we give the final say so.

I feel the key to the whole solution is the elimination of the Nhus from active participation in affairs Vietnam. By elimination I do not mean destruction. I hope that we could even pay for a protracted leave of absence from the post to someplace where their voice of authority could not be heard.

I have the feeling that the military involved could live with Diem provided the Nhus were out of the picture. Though I agreed to the change in the terms of reference I based my agreement on the fact that in the past when we have tried to separate Diem from the Nhus, either in action or statement, the result has been nil. On the other hand I too have second thought that we never actually have given Diem a chance to react to any new instructions or advice Amb Lodge might have imparted to him. I have not had a chance to discuss this with the Amb and therefore do not know Diem reaction to the initial conversations. I do know that the feelings here, both in the military and civilian, run high against the Nhus—and from reading reports from world wide sources there is a great deal of concern and confusion as to just who is running Vietnam. At this time people are choosing sides and the various factions are lining up one against the other. Again, at this time, it is not at all clear what the line-up will be. Big Minh has asked to meet with CAS in the morning. Purpose of the meeting is unknown. It might clarify some of the unknowns.

In my opinion as things stand now I don't believe there is sufficient reason for a crash approval on our part at this time.

If, as reported and not absolutely confirmed, Nhu and cohorts have taken enough action in the eyes of the civilians and military here—and the world—to put themselves way out on the end of a limb, it might be that if we continue the pressure on Diem, Nhu and cohorts will be forced to take the initial actions which would make any reaction by the local military the next logical step. To me this is bound to come. The Vietnamese people can't live with them, the military can't live with them, and neither can we.

My one hope above all is that whatever happens there will be little or no bloodshed and we can get back to the main purpose of our being here—helping these very fine people fight the war against the VC.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to Felt, to Bundy at the White House (where it was received at 2:43 p.m., August 28), to Rusk, Ball, and Harriman at the Department of State, and to McCone at CIA.

 ² Vol. III, p. 628.

³ The text of this message is contained in CINCPAC 281916Z, August 28, repeated to the Department of State by the JCS as 281941Z, August 28. The text reads as follows:

“State has sent message to Amb Lodge and exclusive to me authorizing course of action to give Diem chance to rid himself of Nhu and his gang and to replace with best available military and civilian. Ambassador will consult with you and CT. Note particularly line of action 2 which has to do with military leaders. I talked to WashDC while policy was being formulated and while message being drafted and cleared. My opinion is embodied in the message. I volunteered your support. As related matter, I have reviewed your OPlans 60-62 and 61-62. Assistance is available on short notice but you should anticipate possible needs and make appropriate requests.” (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables)

⁴ vol. III, p. 653..

⁵ *Ibid* p. 667.

⁶ In this telegram to Taylor, August 28, Harkins noted that telegram 243 to Saigon, August 24, implied his support and Felt had already volunteered his support. In the absence of specific instructions and unless otherwise directed, therefore, he planned to support Lodge fully. (National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-172-69)

5. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, August 28, 1963—5:16 p.m.

TELEPHONE CALL FROM MR BUNDY

B said the mtg at 6 is acquiring more importance because of a real possible split between State and DOD—does not think it will be the same without Sec because Harriman is so passionate and can't speak for Dept as Sec can and Sec's and Bob's relation is helpful. Sec will be there. B thinks Bob and Taylor think more than the record indicates that decisions taken Sat were without adequate consultation between State and DOD. B read from a message.² Pres likely to start 6 p.m. mtg by talking with Sec, McNamara, Taylor and B as notetaker to get a slightly common front on this. B said Hilsman has most of the stuff.

¹ Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Phyllis D. Bernau.

² Apparent reference to telegram JCS 3368-63, [vol. III, p. 675](#) .

6. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, August 28, 1963, 6 p.m.

SUBJECT

Viet-Nam

PARTICIPANTS

White House

The President
McGeorge Bundy
Mr. Forrestal

State Department

Secretary of State
Governor Harriman
Assistant Secretary Hilsman
Ambassador Nolting

Defense Department

Secretary of Defense McNamara
Deputy Secretary Gilpatric
Gen. Maxwell Taylor
Major Gen. Victor Krulak

CIA

General Carter, Deputy Director
Richard Helms, Deputy Director for Plans

Justice

Attorney General Kennedy

Treasury

Secretary Dillon

USIA

Mr. Edward Murrow

The Vice President

The meeting was delayed because of the preceding civil rights meeting. The President asked the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, Mac Bundy and General Taylor to meet with him privately in another room.

Upon their return the President announced that three messages would be sent to Saigon—one from General Taylor to General Harkins asking him for his personal assessment of the situation and the plans of the generals.² The second is a personal message from the President to Lodge³

saying that the President wanted to be assured that there was full coordination between Saigon and Washington; that he wanted Ambassador Lodge's personal and frank assessment; that he wanted to avoid any situation in which the field was going ahead on a plan that was against their better judgment because they thought it was orders from Washington and that Washington was issuing instructions on the false assumption that the field agreed; the third cable⁴ is the general cable drafted by McNamara, Harriman, Bundy, Forrestal and Hilsman following this morning's meeting.⁵

Smith's memorandum continued:

"The President concluded the meeting by saying we wanted to get (General Harkins' views as to what we should do, not his reaction to what he thought was the decision here. The President repeated that General Harkins' message was not clear on this point."

The meeting broke up with Mr. Harriman's saying "Mr. President, I was very puzzled by the cable from General Harkins until I read the outgoing from General Taylor."⁶ (The President had some difficulty containing himself until everyone had left the room, whereupon he burst into laughter and said, "Averell Harriman is one sharp cookie.")⁷

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam, White House Meetings, State memcons. Top Secret; Eyes Only; No Distribution. Drafted by Hilsman. The meeting was held at the White House. There are two other records of this meeting: a memorandum of conference by Bromley Smith, August 28 (*ibid.*, National Security File, Meetings and Memoranda, Meetings on Vietnam) and a memorandum for the record by Krulak, August 28 (National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Vietnam, chap. XXIII).

² *Infra*. According to Smith's memorandum of this meeting, the President made the following remarks about the message to Harkins: "We were in doubt about General Harkins' views. We thought he was for the coup plan, but General Harkins apparently thought that a decision had been made in Washington to back a coup and that his task was to carry out a decision communicated to him."

³ Document 9.

⁴ Document 8.

⁵ Bromley Smith's memorandum included the following account of revisions of telegram 268: "The group went over the draft message to Ambassador Lodge sentence by sentence. Mr. Bundy suggested that the second paragraph be revised so that Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins would not feel that they had to go ahead with the plan to support a coup. Mr. Bundy also suggested revising paragraph 4 to show that removing the Nhus is the most important objective."

⁶ General Harkins' cable is [Document 4](#). General Taylor's cable is JCS 3368-63, [vol. III, p. 675](#) .

⁷ According to Krulak's account of this meeting, Harriman and the President had the following exchange near the end of the meeting: "Governor Harriman stated that he hoped we are not giving any idea of wobbling on our course. The President stated that the important thing is that we have to make sense; we must not let the field feel that we are in any way heavy-handed, or obliging them to take actions which are not, in their good judgement, sound."

7. Telegram From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) to the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins)¹

Washington, August 28, 1963—8:36 p.m.

JCS 3385-63. The President has read your MACV 1557² and has asked me to send the following reply. He is most desirous of receiving your personal views on this operation at this stage and as it may develop later. You should not be inhibited by concern over what the Washington view may be; we need your on-the-spot impressions of the best course of action.

Your recent message raises certain questions on which we should like amplification:

- a. In saying "the die is cast" do you mean that it is too late to turn back from supporting the Generals? Later in the cable you appear to favor going direct to Diem prior to encouraging the coup.
- b. You state that there is insufficient reason for "a crash approval on our part." Does this mean that we can delay a decision for a matter of days, for example. What are the risks of leaks, apprehension of leaders by Diem or of premature coup action?
- c. You state that "if we continue the pressure on Diem", Nhu may be levered into provocative action. What forms of pressure do you have in mind?
- d. What role can you play in influencing the senior military authorities? At some time in the near future should you not talk to Big Minh and perhaps some of the other Generals and assess the quality of their plans? We do not want to become involved in any coup which will not succeed.

These are some of the points on which you can help us. The President wants you to know that he reposes great confidence in you and wants your uninhibited advice. Next meeting with President will be 1200 EDT August 29. He would like to hear from you by that time.

In closing, let me say that while this operation got off to a rather uncoordinated start, it is now squarely on the track and all Washington agencies are participating fully in its support.

This message closely parallels concurrent State cable to Ambassador Lodge.³

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only; Operational Immediate. Also sent to Lodge, Felt, McNamara, Gilpatric, McGeorge Bundy, Rusk, Ball, Hilsman, Harriman, Helms, and each of the Joint Chiefs. Hilsman refers to this telegram in *To Move a Nation*, p. 493 [*Pg. 493 includes portions of [Doc. 244](#) and [Doc. 245](#)*].

² Document 4.

³ *infra*.

8. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, August 28, 1963—9:32 p.m.

268. Eyes only for Ambassador and Gen. Harkins.

1. Your 364² 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 [*document number not declassified*],³ 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 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 wish [wish] to bind you against your better judgment at any stage. Conversely, while we assume Generals' operation still subject to delay or cancellation, if you believe die 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 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 in affecting all individual decisions of uncertain key figures?
 - (d) undertake and 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 beginning evacuation of appropriate US dependent personnel?
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 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 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.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Emergency. Repeated to CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Felt. The text of this telegram was sent from the White House for transmission over Department of State channels. It was cleared by Rusk and Hilsman.

² Vol. III, p. 668.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 671.

9. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, August 28, 1963—9:33 p.m.

269. Eyes only for the Ambassador from the President. You are getting separately a longer message (Deptel 268)² 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 Chiefs³ give some impression of uncertainty on his part as to presently planned timing of action by Generals, so I am asking through General Taylor⁴ 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 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, Washington will act as a 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 in you.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Top Secret; Emergency. The text of this message was sent from the White House for transmission over Department of State channels. It was cleared personally by Rusk and Hilsman.

² *Supra*.

³ MAC 1540, [vol. III, p. 655](#), and MAC 1557, [Document 4](#).

⁴ See [Document 7](#).

10. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, August 29, 1963, 1 p.m.

371. Hilsman from Kattenburg. Had three hour conversation with President Diem afternoon August 28. More than on earlier occasions (1955, 1958) he talked largely to himself. While there no doubt he is in full possession his faculties, impression of growing neurosis cannot be escaped. Was as if words themselves had magic which made them believable as they came out and he then echoed and re-echoed them further. In moment real emotion, toward end of conversation he said "I'm ready to die, at once, if sweat and blood of last nine years now to be sacrificed to small group of agitators in Buddhist disguise, whom population any case despises."

Diem made vigorous and impassioned defense his policies since May 8 Hue incident, described communist infiltration Buddhist clergy in minute detail (mumbling largely irrelevant and very hard to follow examples, none of which when further reflected upon constitute any real hard evidence—though I asked him provide same and he said he would "when inquiry is complete").

He also passionately defended brothers Nhu and Thuc, stating it was "criminal" that U.S. press would attack a man of such total integrity and holy devotion as Thuc. Described brother Nhu as pure intellectual, a philosopher who never raised voice in debate, never sought favor for himself, said "wish Americans could provide me with another like him." As for Madame Nhu, he had said things to her but she had been mightily provoked by U.S. press. Republican Youth of both sexes, main achievement of Nhus, had been perhaps greatest benefit brought to country since 1954, symbolized new, vital and democratic generation brought out of vacuum in which country plunged when he took over. Brother Luyen had seen rightly reasons for government policies, was explaining them effectively in London, and contrasted with perfidy of Chuong who had never forgiven fact some his ricelands taken in land reform.

Do Van Ly, who had been with Diem in U.S. (as I would remember) was philosopher and capable publicist. Prince Buu Hoi had left Saigon and

would represent Viet-Nam in UN if debate took place. (Diem did not specify when he would arrive New York.) Buu Hoi had been ill at first when seeing condition to which bonzes had brought his mother, but had recovered and realized insane atmosphere which leading younger bonzes ("les meneurs") were creating in pagodas and Buddhist community.

Viet-Nam was still much too underdeveloped to be properly understood by most Westerners. Bonzes had from beginning played on traditional primitive proclivities in people for irrational acts, had consciously developed wild atmosphere of raving and noise. All this carefully stirred up by extremely clever Viet Cong cadres. Latter were still at it and GVN knew who some of them were and were following them in present wanderings in pagodas all across SVN.

Diem said Buddhist issue now entirely solved. He had met morning August 28 with members Vietnamese Sangha, real representatives Vietnamese Buddhist clergy which shunted aside by agitators like 24-year old Nghiep who dignified in U.S. press as "venerable." Meeting had brought complete solution all points at issue and mutual respect both sides. Now that country rid of agitators, it could go back to winning war and principal task building democracy through Strategic Hamlet Program.

Action night of August 20 had been unanimously requested by Generals on 19th and 20th and he had agreed, after careful personal study, that government could no longer tolerate impossible situation created by Communist controlled agitators. How could American press and even official broadcasts accuse Colonel Tung ("not a great warrior, but a good man in special operations against NVN") of being responsible for action which all Generals his armed forces had pressed on him out of patriotic sense of duty and devotion to country.

But U.S. press was in any case most irresponsible and creating terribly dangerous misunderstandings. Constant misstatement of fact in U.S. press must be corrected, and he asked me do all I possibly could to help in this, "for sake all our years of work" and all that had been built up, and in midst terrible war against cruel and implacable enemy. He realized latter would stop at nothing, not even at organizing attacks in U.S. against his government. But at least "technical cadres" among American services here who were organizing U.S. press corps against him should stop their insane activities. He made this last plea in strong and impassioned language.

I was unable to break in more than once or twice, but did manage convey to him, I think (speaking frankly as friend, having known him 10 years), that his image abroad, and I thought in Viet-Nam too, had deteriorated considerably. I asked whether he intended convoke National Assembly explain government actions and whether and when he would hold new elections. He responded he was studying possibility meeting Assembly, failed to respond to question on elections. When I was finally able break monologue and leave, he said with great sincerity "try help us." I said "please try to do same for us."

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution. Received at 3:17 a.m. and passed to the White House, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and CIA.

11. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, August 29, 1963, 4 p.m.

373. Eyes only for the President from Lodge. In separate telegram to State Department² I try, in collaboration with General Harkins, to respond to questions in your 269.³ This represents my very best thought and conclusions reached during stay in Vietnam which has been short but also rich with opportunities to observe, learn and evaluate. Any course is risky, and no action at all is perhaps the riskiest of all. Thank you for your expression of confidence in me as your personal representative. I appreciate this very much and will do my best to deserve it.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Top Secret; Emergency. Received at 4:42 a.m. and passed to the White House at 4:52 a.m.

² Document 12.

³ Document 9.

12. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, August 29, 1963, 6 p.m.

375. CINCPAC Exclusive for Felt.

1. We are launched on a course from which there is no respectable fuming 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
2. The chance of bringing off a Generals' coup depends on them to some extent; but it depends at least as much on us.
3. We should proceed to make all-out effort to get Generals to move promptly. To do so we should have authority to do following:
 - (a) That 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 question (c) in Deptel 268,³ I would not hesitate to use financial inducements if I saw a useful opportunity.

As to (d) I favor such moves, provided it is made clear they are 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.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Emergency; Eyes Only. Repeated Operational Immediate to CINCPAC.

Received at 7:03 a.m. and passed to the White House, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and CIA. Printed also in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, vol. 11, pp. 738-739 and Declassified Documents 1982, 591 B.

² August 25. Apparent reference to telegram 243 to Saigon, [vol. III, p. 628](#) . Because of the time difference between Saigon and Washington, telegram 243 arrived in Vietnam on August 25.

³ Document 8.

13. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Saigon, August 29, 1963—5:30 p.m.

MAC 1566. Ref. JCS 3385-63.² Amplification statements in my MACV 1557³ follows:

- A. By reference to die being cast I meant that Generals have received assurance of U.S. support in their projected task of removal of Nhu from position of influence. Should we withhold such support U.S./RVN relations would be estranged indefinitely and future effectiveness of support programs in Vietnam would be zero. Withholding previously proffered support would constitute breach of faith and would undoubtedly result in failure of Vietnamese to ever again be able to place credence in official U.S. statements or commitments. Amplification my views with regard going direct to Diem prior to encouraging the coup contained in para C below.
- B. Generals will not move without U.S. support and until detailed practical plans are drawn, and forces aligned. The status of plans, if any, at the moment are extremely well guarded secrets from U.S. military authority. They are likely to remain so. There are so many rumors flying around that piecemeal leaks may well be inconsequential. Plotters have kept their number to an absolute minimum, apparently. A problem facing the Generals and arguing against precipitate action on their part is I believe their genuine patriotic desire to accomplish their ends with absolute minimum of bloodshed and damage. If Generals can line up overwhelming strength to guarantee quick relatively painless decision, I believe they will do so at the cost of a few days time. In meantime believe only danger of rash or premature acts lies with pro Nhu forces if they see intolerable balance of power lining up against them. Such rash action seems unlikely yet. The security of key Generals is good, except for Big Minh who is not physically located at JCS. Believe that as long as Big Minh moves about openly, the Nhu forces do not dare eliminate him. In the meantime opportunity is open to persuade Diem to remove Nhu.
- C. In my view, we can and should bring further pressure on Diem concurrent with continued negotiations with Generals. The two approaches are not incompatible provided we inform the Generals in

advance of our ultimatums, being presented Diem. I believe that Ambassador should immediately make firm effort, repeated as necessary, to convince Diem to send Nhus abroad, as private citizens, as condition for continued U.S. support of his regime. Amb could reinforce demarche with world condemnation of Vietnam over Buddhist reprisals which all believe engineered by Nhus. Diem may well refuse but his refusal of this direct ultimatum, often considered but never before advanced, will certainly stiffen our resolve to back the Generals as the only remaining course of action. Moreover, should this approach, and the possibility that Diem may accept, force Nhu to attempt his own coup, the position of the Generals coup group will be strengthened militarily and psychologically in any counter-coup action.

Ambassador does not concur in this approach. My thought is we should do everything possible and leave no course of action untried in our efforts to solve the present dilemma without bloodshed.

As to what role can I play I might try assist Amb Lodge in placing pressure on Diem by indicating how present state of affairs so detrimental to war effort which has been going so well. Attempt at this time on my part to see Big Minh would I believe only put the finger on him. You will note from CAS [*document number not declassified*]⁴ Minh has advised U.S. assistance Special Forces company "accidentally" stationed by his quarters. CAS [*document number not declassified*] also indicated Generals are quite coy as regards any details of their plans. Such position on their part I believe is understandable at this time. Up to now I have not discussed any plan of action with Generals. In fact I have no authority to do so. However I am ready to do so if directed, and if it is determined CAS has gone as far as it can go-and Generals now need more concrete assurance of U.S. backing. As I see most of the Generals quite frequently, approach can be done in course of normal meetings. I agree we do not want to back any plan that does not augur for success.

In summation it is my opinion that not only are we unalterably committed to support actions of Generals to relieve Vietnam from the Nhu influences but that also such course of action is in the best interests of our country.

Skillful execution on part of all concerned could lead to successful accomplishment of task with little or no bloodshed. We must accept fact that less skillful execution while still accomplishing over-all aim could well result in more intense actions with resultant severe consequences.

However on balance feel that competence of those involved and their determination to rid their country of festering sore will insure success.

In all corps the war against the VC is progressing, although at somewhat diminished rate.

Apparent atmosphere of calm prevails throughout Saigon which belies the intense undercurrents which abound within the city which is rife with rumors, tensions and undercurrents. Situation is potentially explosive.

Suggested course of U.S. action is to continue our present assurances of support to the Generals while at the same time attempting persuade Diem to take necessary action to remove Nhus from country.

¹ Source: National Defense University; Taylor Papers, T-172-63. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to CINCPAC for Felt.

² Document 7.

³ Document 4.

⁴ Dated August 29, not printed. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, CIA Cables)

14. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the President and the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)¹

Washington, August 29, 1963—10:10 a.m.

SUBJECT

Viet-Nam: Reporting of Tad Szulc, New York Times²

The President said he thought Tad Szulc seemed to be getting pretty close to things. Mr. Hilsman said the whole point here is the mere fact that for the benefit of the military out there we had to do something to get the blame off them and that, of course, is bound to give smart pressmen grounds for speculation. He called attention to the latter part of the article and said that it left the impression that we are trying to give that things are simmering, that the situation must be allowed to mature. Mr. Hilsman assured the President that the situation was being watched very closely.

The President said, "We are not making any more press comments, are we?" Mr. Hilsman said inevitably there have to be statements on events. For example, when the Vietnamese Government says we were wrong when we protested the beating up of the pagodas then we had to reply that we stand by our statement of the other day. Nothing beyond that.

The President asked if Mr. Hilsman thought anyone was talking to Szulc. Mr. Hilsman said he did not think anyone was. The people here are under strict instructions. He said the President would notice the article was based on GVN statements and USG statements—the only things attributed to the US Government are past hard statements. The rest are Szulc's deductions.

The President said, "O.K., Roger, fine."

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series—Vietnam. Secret; Limit Distribution. Prepared in the Department of State.

² Apparent reference to a New York Times article entitled, "Long Crisis Seen on Vietnam Rule," August 28, in which Szulc reported that some

officials in Washington believed the only solution for the Vietnam crisis was to remove Nhu, or Nhu and Diem if the two brothers were inseparable, by a military coup. These unnamed officials were, according to Szulc, not sure that such a plan was feasible.

15. Memorandum of Conference With the President¹

Washington, August 29, 1963, noon.

SUBJECT
Vietnam

OTHERS PRESENT

Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, Secretary Dillon, General Carter, Director Murrow, Under Secretary Harriman, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric, General Krulak, Ambassador Nolting, Assistant Secretary Hilsman, Mr. Helms, Mr. Bundy, General Clifton, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Bromley Smith

Secretary Rusk reported that both Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins agreed that the war against the Viet Cong in Vietnam cannot be won under the Diem regime.² General Harkins wants to try to separate the Nhus from Diem. He believes our target is more Nhu than Diem. The question for decision is whether to instruct General Harkins to back up the approaches made to the Vietnamese generals by the CIA agents. Ambassador Lodge has already told one CIA official, Mr. Phillips, to tell the Vietnamese generals that the U.S. Ambassador is behind the CIA approach. Although indicating our support of a coup, we should avoid getting committed to the details of the generals' coup planning.

Ambassador Nolting³ said the first question the coup generals would ask was whether they could use the U.S. helicopters now operating with the Vietnamese army.

The President asked whether anyone had any reservations about the course of action we were following.⁴ The issue was whether we should continue as we are now doing or withdraw from the present effort.

Secretary McNamara recommended that we disassociate ourselves from efforts to bring about a coup, but he did favor an attempt by General Harkins to get Diem to fire Nhu. He believed that this effort should be undertaken sometime later, i.e. two or three days later, when the coup capability of the Vietnamese generals is greater. Mr. Gilpatric agreed with this view, adding that we should confront Diem with an ultimatum expiring within a few hours so that Diem could not take counteraction against the generals in the period before they were ready to act.

Secretary McNamara said he sees no valid alternative to the Diem regime. Vice President Tho is apparently not the man to replace Diem. A military junta of the Vietnamese generals now planning a coup is not capable of running the Vietnamese government for very long. Therefore, a last effort should be made to persuade Diem to change his government by dismissing Nhu.

In response to the President's question as to who is running the government now, Ambassador Nolting replied that President Diem was in control and continuing to work his usual eighteen hours a day. Diem relies on Nhu for ideas. His executive officer is Thuan who is opposed to Nhu but loyal to Diem. Thuan would remain with Diem if Nhu were dismissed.

Secretary Rusk pointed out that we were dealing with Nhu who, if a coup were successful, would lose power and possibly his life. Therefore, Nhu had nothing to lose and we must recognize this fact in dealing with him. Nhu might call on the North Vietnamese to help him throw out the Americans. The U.S. should not go to Diem with a request that he fire Nhu but that the Vietnamese generals, as a prelude to a coup, demand of Diem that he dismiss Nhu.

Secretary McNamara said he favors trying to save Diem, but Ambassador Lodge appears not to support such an attempt.

Secretary Rusk said that the first phase is to remove Nhu and Madame Nhu from power. Ambassador Lodge appears to believe that there is no hope of separating Diem and Nhu.

Mr. Murrow pointed out that problems of public opinion would be simpler if the Vietnamese generals are in the posture of remaining loyal to a Diem who had dismissed the Nhus. Mr. Bundy pointed out the great difficulty of attempting a coup which resulted in Diem remaining as head of the government. He foresaw great difficulty in trying to save Diem as the figurehead of a new government.

Ambassador Nolting suggested that we inform both Diem and the Vietnamese generals that there would be no U.S. economic or political support until the changes we demanded were made. He asked that we talk to Diem directly. He predicted that Diem would not be surprised to be told by us that the Vietnamese generals also want a change in the government.

The President pointed out that if Diem says no to a change in government there would be no way in which we could withdraw our demand.⁵

General Taylor urged that before any ultimatum was given to Diem we have a coup plan in our hip pocket. He cautioned against the U.S. getting involved in the coup planning in such a way as to prematurely commit us to an uncertain coup to be carried out by people we were uncertain about.

Secretary Rusk acknowledged that we should not get into detailed planning of a coup, but we did have a need to know whether the generals were counting on our support.

General Taylor urged that any coup plan be given to General Harkins who could say whether or not in his opinion it was militarily feasible.

The President commented that an announcement that we were cutting off U.S. aid was a bad signal. Mr. Hilsman responded that we need a U.S. signal which could be given by General Harkins and other U.S. military officers.

Mr. Bundy said that General Harkins could be instructed to tell the generals that the CIA channel is spelling out official U.S. policy. Mr. Hilsman added that reassurance by U.S. military officers to certain Vietnamese generals might persuade those generals on the fence to come over in support of a coup.

Secretary McNamara recommended that for the time being we do not give Ambassador Lodge authority to say, at a time of his choosing, that U.S. aid to Diem is stopping. Secretary Rusk said that we could wait until the generals form a government and then announce that we are transferring to them U.S. aid.

Secretary McNamara suggested that we do not announce we are cutting aid, but wait until the generals have taken over the government, we recognized the new government, and then say publicly that our aid would be continued to the new government. Mr. Bundy commented that prompt recognition of a new government and an announcement that we were continuing U.S. aid to them would convince everyone that we had been in cahoots with the Vietnamese generals.

The President said that we could announce we were suspending our aid because of the unstable conditions in Vietnam. However, this was a later action and we should decide now on the actions to be taken immediately.

Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara agreed that we should instruct General Harkins to back up the CIA and get information about coup planning. General Taylor asked that we avoid making any commitment to the generals until they had produced a coup plan acceptable to us.

The President commented that the Vietnamese generals would obviously try to get us more and more involved, recalling a comment made by Ambassador Nolting—what was our position if we were asked whether U.S. forces were available to support the Vietnamese generals? Mr. Hilsman said our objective was merely to reassure the generals of our support. These generals want to have a bloodless coup and will not need to use U.S. equipment with the exception of possibly U.S. helicopters.

Secretary McNamara suggested we learn as much as we can about the coup plans without talking about the use of U.S. forces. Mr. Bundy added that the coup was their show and that we should stick with our plan, which was to support the Vietnamese effort.

The President raised the problem of evacuating U.S. nationals and asked whether our capability was sufficient. Secretary McNamara summarized parts of the evacuation plan, calling attention to the forces which can be brought to Saigon within ten hours. General Taylor said it was hard to describe the evacuation force as sufficient to the need, but the military is moving additional U.S. forces into areas closer to Vietnam so that they would have a capability of expanding the number of people who could be quickly evacuated.

The President summarized the agreed actions to be taken:

1. General Harkins is to be instructed to back up the CIA approaches to the Vietnamese generals.
2. Ambassador Lodge is to be authorized to announce the suspension of U.S. aid. We have to give him this authority, but we should control the timing of this announcement.
3. No announcement is to be made of the movement of U.S. forces to the area. This information will leak out in any event. We do not want the Vietnamese to conclude that we are getting in a position to intervene in Vietnam with U.S. fighting forces.

4. Ambassador Lodge is to have authority over all overt and covert operations.

Mr. Helms suggested that certain planned covert actions which would lead to a considerable amount of confusion in Vietnam would be taken only when all plans for the coup were ready. Mr. Hilsman said that a group was at work listing covert actions to be taken in the event of a military coup. The President asked that this list⁶ be made available to him this afternoon.

Secretary Rusk called attention to the high risk which is involved in the course of action we were taking. He warned that shooting of and by Americans would almost certainly be involved. Before any action is over he said that American troops would be firing their weapons and American citizens might be killed.

The President asked what approach was to be made to Diem. Secretary Rusk responded that in the cable to Ambassador Lodge we would raise the question of who should talk to Diem and when, but we would not instruct him in the next day or two to tell Diem that Nhu must go.

The President asked what we would tell Diem. Must we tell him that he must choose among firing Nhu or having us cease our aid or being faced with a military coup. Ambassador Nolting responded by pointing out that Ambassador Lodge so far had had no substantive talk with Diem. He urged that we instruct Ambassador Lodge to have a cards-down talk with Diem now. This talk would take place before we discussed a coup with the Vietnamese generals. If we proceed in this fashion, we would have nothing to hide. He said we should tell Diem that we want a new deal and that our commitments have been altered by recent events in Vietnam. If we lay it on the line with Diem, telling him that we can't continue our aid unless he changes, we, by so doing, would have the best chance of getting a stable base on which we could continue the war against the Viet Cong.

Mr. Bundy urged that we not tell Ambassador Lodge to do something he does not want to do. Secretary Rusk pointed out that if Ambassador Lodge takes this line with Diem, telling him he must change or else, the effect will be to stimulate Nhu to immediate action.

Mr. Bundy noted that Ambassador Lodge hasn't yet said anything to Diem.

Ambassador Nolting recommended that both Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins see Diem and Nhu and tell them how they have alienated the Vietnamese people and the Vietnamese military officers. The resulting situation is one which we cannot accept. Secretary Rusk disagreed with this suggestion and predicted that the sole result would be to trigger action by Nhu. We should not proceed along this line until the generals are ready to launch a coup.

The President commented that if Diem rejects our demands, there is the possibility that the generals' planning would be upset and Nhu would act against them.

Ambassador Nolting said it was not clear whether the generals want to get rid of both Nhu and Diem. He said that he believed the generals wanted to get rid of both Nhus and believed that we could live with Diem and a new government. Mr. Hilsman noted that we have already told the generals that they can keep Diem in their new government if they wished. This is a decision which is up to them.

Mr. Bundy said he had heard from Director McCone, who is not in Washington. Mr. McCone says he favors another attempt to persuade Nhu to leave. He even suggested that Mr. Colby, who knows Nhu, make this attempt. Mr. McCone wants to be certain that a coup can be brought off before we commit ourselves to supporting the generals' attempt.

Secretary Rusk repeated this view that our main target is the Nhus.

A smaller group met with the President in his office. The cables of instruction were agreed upon.⁷

Note: The President telephoned Mr. Bundy from Hyannisport, with the result that Mr. Bundy sent a cable,⁸ Personal-Eyes Only, from the President to Ambassador Lodge, reserving ultimate decision on U.S. action. Ambassador Lodge replied the following morning, expressing his understanding of the President's reservation.⁹ Secretaries Rusk and McNamara were the only officials in the government who knew of this message and the reply (copies attached).

Bromley Smith¹⁰

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. The meeting was held at the White House. There are two other records of this meeting: a memorandum of conversation by Hilsman, August 29 (*ibid.*, Hilsman Papers, White House Meetings, State memcons) and a memorandum for the record by Krulak, August 29 (National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-172-69).

² See [Documents 11, 12](#), and [13](#).

³ Hilsman's and Krulak's records of the discussion at this meeting both recount that Nolting recommended, to use Hilsman's phrase, "one last try with Diem." Krulak's version also adds that Nolting thought that "the likelihood of separating the two [Diem and Nhu] is slight." Hilsman and Krulak also include an observation by Hilsman that the conversation between Kattenburg and Diem (see [Document 10](#)) indicated that it would be fruitless to try to split Nhu from Diem.

⁴ Hilsman includes in his record the following exchange among the President and his advisers at approximately this point in the discussion:

"The Secretary said that although we had a need to know the adequacy of the plan, we should not get directly into planning.

"Mr. Hilsman asked if the Secretary was making a distinction between participating in coup planning and further reassurances to the Generals. The Secretary said that this was precisely the distinction he was making.

"Ambassador Nolting intervened and asked if we intended to get so deep into engineering a coup against Diem as to, for example, use American helicopters to transport the forces of the coup Generals to Saigon.

"The President said that he wanted to get back to the basic question. In the light of the cables from Lodge and Harkins, was there anyone in the EXCOM who wished to withdraw from the operation? And, secondly, what was the feeling of the EXCOM about the issue of an approach to Diem?"

⁵ Hilsman's record has the President asking at this point: "whether we would really pull out of Vietnam in any event."

⁶ Not found.

⁷ *Infra* and [17](#).

⁸ Document 18.

⁹ See [footnote 2, Document 18](#).

¹⁰ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

16. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, August 29, 1963—5:03 p.m.

272. Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins.

1. Highest level meeting noon today reviewed your 375 and reaffirmed basic course.² Specific decisions follow:
2. In response to your recommendation, General Harkins is hereby authorized to repeat to such Generals as you indicate the messages previously transmitted by CAS officers. He should stress that the USG supports the movement to eliminate the Nhus from the government, but that before arriving at specific understandings with the Generals, General Harkins must know who are involved, resources available to them and overall plan for coup. The USG will support a coup which has good chance of succeeding but plans no direct involvement of U.S. Armed Forces. Harkins should state that he is prepared to establish liaison with the coup planners to review plans, but will not engage directly in joint coup planning.³
3. Question of last approach to Diem remains undecided and separate personal message from Secretary to you⁴ develops our concerns and asks your comment.
4. On movement of U.S. forces, we do not expect to make any announcement or leak at present and believe that any later decision to publicize such movements should be closely connected to developing events on your side. We cannot of course prevent unauthorized disclosures or speculation, but we will in any event knock down any reports of evacuation.
5. You are hereby authorized to announce suspension of aid through Diem Government at a time and under conditions of your choice. In deciding upon 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.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Emergency. The text of this message was sent from the White House for transmission over Department of State channels. According to the memorandum [*supra*](#), the telegram was cleared by the President. Hilsman and Rusk cleared the telegram for transmission. Another copy indicates that the President saw it. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State cables) Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, p. 538.

² See [*Supra*](#). Telegram 375 is [Document 12](#).

³ In telegram 385 from Saigon, August 30, Lodge thanked Rusk for the "prompt decisions," but noted that the Mission had no further contact with the Generals. General Khiem canceled a meeting with a CIA officer and was unavailable to receive a telephone call from Harkins. Lodge thought that this wariness might reflect concern for security. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET)

⁴ *Infra*.

17. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, August 29, 1963—8:17 p.m.

279. Eyes only for the Ambassador from the Secretary. Deeply appreciate your 375² 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.

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 Diem³ 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 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.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Emergency. Drafted by Rusk, cleared with the White House, and approved by Hilsman. Another copy of this telegram has a marginal note indicating the President read it. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables) Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, p. 539.

² Document 12.

³ See [Document 10](#).

18. Message From the President to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)¹

Washington, August 29, 1963.

I have approved all the messages you are receiving from others today, and I emphasize that everything in these messages has my full support.

We will do all that we can to help you conclude this operation successfully. Nevertheless, there is one point on my own constitutional responsibilities as President and Commander in Chief which I wish to state to you in this entirely private message, which is not being circulated here beyond the Secretary of State.

Until the very moment of the go signal for the operation by the Generals, I must reserve a contingent right to change course and reverse previous instructions. While fully aware of your assessment of the consequences of such a reversal, I know from experience that failure is more destructive than an appearance of indecision. I would, of course, accept full responsibility for any such change as I must bear also the full responsibility for this operation and its consequences. It is for this reason that I count on you for a continuing assessment of the prospects of success and most particularly desire your candid warning if current course begins to go sour. When we go, we must go to win, but it will be better to change our minds than fail. And if our national interest should require a change of mind, we must not be afraid of it.

This message requires no direct answer but if you do wish to reply, your answer should be unnumbered and headed "For President Only, pass White House directly, no other distribution whatever," and referencing White House cite number.²

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Staff Memorandum, MG Bundy. Transmitted in telegram CAP 63465 with the notations: "Personal for the Ambassador from the President" and "No Department or other distribution whatever". The source text is a copy that Bundy sent to Clifton under cover of a Top Secret Eyes Only memorandum of August 30, which reads as follows:

"The enclosed envelope should be opened by the President only, and when he has read the messages it contains you should destroy them. The reason for this extraordinary procedure is that these messages are not in the normal series and their existence is not known except to the President and to the Secretary of State, so I do not want them in a message file that may be seen by others who believe themselves privy to the most classified material. You should tell the President, however, that I discussed the outgoing message in draft with the Secretaries of State and Defense who concurred in it. The Secretary of Defense in particular thought it was a wise and necessary cable.

"You may wish to ask the President after he has read the messages whether he wants to send any further message to the Ambassador on this topic. My own advice is not to do so at this time, but to be ready to call his attention to this question again if the developing situation makes it advisable.

"I am sorry to be so cryptic."

The other message included in the envelope for the President was Lodge's reply; see [footnote 2](#) below.

² Lodge replied in WHASA 16262 directly to the President with no other distribution whatever, August 30, noon, as follows: "1. I fully understand that you have the right and responsibility to change course at any time. Of course I will always respect that right. "2. To be successful, this operation must be essentially a Vietnamese affair with a momentum of its own. Should this happen you may not be able to control it, i.e. the 'go signal' may be given by the Generals." (*Ibid.*)

19. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, August 30, 1963.

[document number not declassified] 1. On evening 29 August, [less than 1 line not declassified] informed CAS that he had a report from a source of medium reliability to the effect that within 24 hours the govt would begin the arrest of Generals who might not be fully loyal. The [less than 1 line not declassified] rep intimated that this was the same source who on 20 Aug had provided report forecasting govt attack on the pagodas.

2. It was decided to attempt alert the Generals to this information while cautioning them that info was not confirmed and could be speculative. Of the various means available to pass this in best was thought to be contact with Major Nhieu who is next-door neighbor of Colonel Ralph E. Newman, USAF, MAAG. Major Nhieu is the Administrative Assistant of General Duong Van Minh. Newman, Nhieu and General Minh have a close relationship resulting from fact Colonel Newman was General Big Minh's advisor for approx 7 months.

3. Col Newman was contacted by a CAS officer. Col Newman immediately attempted contact with Major Nhieu but was unable to telephone him or to find anyone at home at Major Nhieu's residence. Col Newman volunteered that he was also on good terms with General Le Van Kim and could probably pass message to General Kim.

4. Newman was requested to call General Kim and state he had been approached by Vietnamese friend who was extremely worried about his son who had been arrested on Sunday during roundup of students and that Newman very much wanted talk with General Kim with respect to securing release of arrested boy.

5. Colonel Newman placed call to General Kim's residence and noted immediately that telephone line was being monitored. An individual attempting to imitate General Kim's voice came onto the line and repeatedly requested Colonel Newman's location. Col Newman then asked to speak to Mrs. Kim. A woman then came on line and Colonel Newman recognized her voice as that of Mrs. Kim. Col Newman passed message concerning fictitious arrested student and asked come to General Kim's

house. The line was then broken. Very soon thereafter, General Kim's aide came to Col Newman's house and escorted Col Newman and CAS officer to General Kim's house. The message was passed to General Kim who was most appreciative of the warning. General Kim promised to get the message to General Big Minh immediately. General Kim did state that it was very dangerous for Col Newman to come to his house and that for the time being these contacts should be suspended. Col Newman noted the presence of approx one platoon of troops in the vicinity of General Kim's house. Upon departure from Kim's house Newman and CAS officer were escorted away from the house over a back road and through gates apparently very seldom used.

6. There are at least two among other hazards in the present situation at the Generals' end of this operation. The first is that the arrest of four or five key figures among the Generals might bring this operation to a halt at least for the short run. This action seems easily within capability of GVN. It is puzzling that action of this nature has not already been taken. We can only be speculative on this subject. GVN may be attempting to avoid direct confrontation in hope that steam will gradually go out of Generals' present course. It may worry about causing further disaffection throughout Armed Forces or revolt in corps areas. GVN could be waiting for premature coup to crush military opposition. Or it may be building up its dossiers on course of coup plotting to present to armed forces and general public after arrest of key Generals in effort diminish impact these arrests. Another hazard is that one or another of Generals involved might betray details of operation. So far we cannot point fingers at anyone. Hope HQS will understand that speculation on possible negative factors does not represent negative station attitude. We are bringing all capabilities we can think of to bear.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Operational Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy the CIA sent to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy, and to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 4:45 a.m.

20. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, August 30, 1963, 6 p.m.

383. Eyes only for the Secretary. CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Admiral Felt. Deptel 279.²

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 don't want him.
5. My greatest single difficulty in carrying out the instructions of last Sunday³ is inertia. The days come and go and nothing happens. It is, of course, natural for the Generals to want assurances and the U.S. Government has certainly been prompt in its reactions. But here it is Friday and, while in one way much has been done, there is not yet enough to show for the hours which we have all put in.
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 that 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 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.
13. I am contemplating no further talks with Diem at this time.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Top Secret; Emergency. Received at 7:39 p.m. Repeated Operational Immediate to CINCPAC. According to CAP 63468, August 30, the President read this cable. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables) Also printed in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, Vol. II, pp. 739-740.

² Document 17.

³ August 25; see telegram 243 to Saigon, [vol. III, p. 628](#) .

21. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency to the Station in Saigon¹

Washington, August 30, 1963.

65032. Reference: CAS Saigon [*document number not declassified*].²

1. HQS highly concerned by implications of reference particularly re vital factors of initiative. Query where subsequent Sta contacts with Generals now stand re General Kim warning in paragraph 5 reference.
2. We fully aware need U.S. Government determine rebel Generals plans capabilities before committing them support, but at same time do not feel that other, perhaps more vital factors, should be sacrificed for sake of coordination. Can means other than personal meetings be used to keep contact with Generals such as radio, S/W, cut outs, et cetera.
3. Request Sta check with Ambassador Lodge to determine any actions to be taken prior expiration 24 hours cited by [*less than 1 line not declassified*] source. Urge all bear in mind that GVN may be circulating such reports in order pressure Generals into premature steps which easy to foil. Please advise OPIM.
4. Secretary Hilsman informed of reference. He shares our concern.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy the CIA sent the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 1:58 p.m. According to CAP 63468, August 30, the President read this cable. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables)

² Document 19.

22. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, August 30, 1963.

0483. 1. CAS officer has been having series of conversations over past several days with Lt. Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, former Chief of Kien Hoa Province and now nominally an inspector of strategic hamlets stationed at Presidency.

2. Col Thao has figured prominently in past reporting on coup plotting, both on part of Tran Kim Tuyen and Huynh Van Lang. Col Thao has for some months expressed his dissatisfaction with the Diem regime quite openly and has even written notes to this effect to CAS.

3. On 30 August Col Thao reported to CAS officer that he had attended dinner evening before with Generals Khiem, Khanh, and Duong Van Minh. Main points of conversation follow:

- a. They stated that if someone else takes initiative to mount coup d'etat against GVN, they will support it.
- b. General Khiem pointed out that Generals have too much to lose by initiating a coup. By this he apparently meant in Thao's opinion the Generals' houses, positions and material possessions.
- c. The Generals stated they would support Vice President Tho as temporary interim government. This would represent legality.
- d. Generals Khiem and Khanh agreed that they would support General Minh if both Diem and Nhu are killed during a coup attempt. They would support Tho only if Nhu survived a coup attempt and in preference to Nhu.
- e. Generals for first time openly indicated their opposition to Nhu. Whereas as recently as one week ago they would perhaps privately indicate their opposition to Nhu, they now state this as a group.
- f. Generals said that if first step of attempted coup is successful, i.e., the assassination of President Diem, they would then support the coup openly. Generals Khanh and Khiem promised they would do their best to send units in wrong directions in case they were instructed to take steps to crush coup attempt.
- g. Colonel Thao told Generals it may be necessary to move military units in Saigon. That is, some units inclined to support the government

would be moved away from palace and other units that might support a coup attempt would be brought into position where they could do so. Generals agreed they would do their best to implement this suggestion. They also said they would try to make suggestions to Colonel Le Quang Tung to have the latter move some of his units out of the way. Col Thao claimed that some units have already been moved and that this is proceeding well.

- h. Col Thao claimed that his group now can count on three battalions. They hope to have a total of five battalions. He said that the plan is to use three battalions to hit the palace, keeping two battalions in reserve. This is based on group's belief that they must have enough forces to control the situation for three or four hours. This would give Generals time to proclaim support and come to the assistance of the coup group.
- i. Thao said that his group hopes to execute a coup within one month and preferably sooner. He said that there are risks involved in hasty action and risks involved in waiting too long. The group is attempting to determine the best timing.
- j. Thao said that the following individuals would be welcome in a new government: Vu Van Mau, Tran Van Chuong, Tran Le Quang, Vu Van Thai, Huynh Van Lang, Nguyen Huu Chau. Thao also said that opposition politicians, for example Dai Viet leaders, would be considered if they agreed with the principles of the group. He said that the group is not now in contact with the Dai Viet Party.
- k. Thao said that he would wish to become head of military security in a new government.
- 1. Thao stated that he did not know if his group consisted of the "best men" but he was certain that it consisted of the "most determined".

4. CAS comment: We believe Thao is trying to plan and organize toward a coup at some indeterminate time. Will attempt some assessment of Thao's activities 31 Aug. Ref para 3 g, Thao appears unaware that the Generals he was talking with lack the capability of moving troop units around without Diem's approval, that is, at this time and in the absence of a coup attempt on their own part.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Operational Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy the CIA sent the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army,

exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 1:59 p.m.

23. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, August 30, 1963.

[document number not declassified] Ref: CAS Wash 65032.²

1. During 30 Aug CAS sought meeting with Gen. Khiem who responded through Maj. Nhon that he was "too busy" today. Khiem was called to Palace for lengthy conference this morning. Ambassador has requested Gen. Harkins to call on Khiem for meeting in Harkins' office to offer additional bona fides and to question Gen. Khiem on specific plans and timing. Gen. Harkins' initial attempt to contact Khiem met with response that Gen. Khiem was in conference. Do not know when Generals Harkins and Khiem will get together. We are suspending further contacts until after results of Harkins-Khiem meeting are known.
2. With respect CAS Saigon 0445,³ wish point out that neither Col. Newman nor Col. Strickler have been made aware of initial plans or actions and that Gen. Kim's warning was friendly one to Col. Newman simply requesting that Newman, who is old friend, not call on Gen. Kim over immediate future.
3. Re ref para 2, we have discussed question of SW, radio, cut outs, etc., with Minister Trueheart in absence of Ambassador. We all believe that this kind of communication would not allow enough substantive exchange. For future, we will rely on established liaison between Khiem and CAS officer since latter has excellent reason for contacting Khiem. Will also explore further utilization of Maj. Nhon as cutout. However, if situation progresses to point where Generals will [want?] some tactical advice, Conein might also have to enter into relationship.
4. As addendum, we have previously failed to note that CAS officer did turn over to Khiem, at latter's request, on 28 August complete ordnance list, obtain sketch of Camp Long Thanh showing weapons emplacements. This is cited as another example of assurance re USG intentions since these plans were provided for purpose of attack on Col. Tung's training camp in environs of Saig.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret; Operational Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy the CIA sent the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak.

² Document 21.

³ Document 19.

24. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) to the President¹

Washington, August 30, 1963.

CM-856-63

SUBJECT

Probable Loyalties of Vietnamese Units and Commanders

The enclosure offers, in tabular form, a presentation of the probable loyalties of key military units and commanders in the event a coup d'etat is undertaken in South Vietnam in the near future. With the exception of information on the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps, which originated in the Joint Staff, the summary is based upon a Central Intelligence Agency report received from Saigon on 29 August.²

Maxwell B. Taylor³

[Enclosure]

UNITS IN THE IMMEDIATE Unit SAIGON AREA	Strength	Equipment	Appraisal of Loyalty
Presidential Guard	2,500	15 WWII Tanks, 12 Armored Personnel Carriers, At least 1,000 Automatic Rifles	Most likely will remain loyal to Diem. This is an elite unit and presidential favorite. Leader, LtCol Khoi is strong, and most likely to remain with Diem under any circumstances. The equipment is well adapted to urban fighting.
Armor Branch	4,296	21 WWII Tanks, 41 Armored Personnel	Loyalty to Diem highly questionable. Many dissidents in this branch, whose units are assigned

		Carriers, 14 Armored Cars	to many other organizations. Commander, Col Thien, has no operational command, but has impressive following among unit commanders. The equipment is well adapted to urban fighting.
Airborne Brigade	2,550	Conventional infantry equipment including counter- armor weapons such as bazookas and recoilless rifles.	Could likely be led to act against Diem in case of a coup, either under present leader, Col Vien, or one of the many other dissident officers in brigade. Vien has claimed to be loyal to Diem, but could probably be pushed aside by another in case he should try to remain loyal. This brigade has a history of coup plots and attempts. Unknown. Brigade will probably follow the commander, LtCol Khang who is strong, respected by his subordinates and competent. In past Khang has been steadfast and loyal to Diem, however recent reports indicate he is dissatisfied, upset and perhaps ready to take part in a coup.
Marine Brigade	1,500	Conventional infantry plus artillery and mortars.	
Special Forces (plus additional units)	1,840	Conventional light infantry.	Probably will stand by Diem. All through current unrest these units have been active in Saigon in physical action against Buddhists. These forces are under command of Col Tung, who is judged

Vietnamese Air Force	2,812	63 Light bombers, 17 Helicopters, 38 C-47 Transports	to be absolutely loyal to Diem. His units will most probably follow him. Likely ready to join non- Communist coup group. Unit has history of disaffection. Present commander, Col Hien is a weak leader, but in past has been strongly sympathetic to Diem and Nhu. Many officers in the Air Force are capable, and are ready to take over command.
Vietnamese Navy	2,200	Light infantry; river boats with machine guns; patrol craft with 20 and 40 mm cannons.	Likely to remain loyal to Diem. Can probably be held together by present commander, Capt Quyen, who in two coup crises in the past, has sided with Diem immediately and emphatically.
Quang Trung Training Center	Highly variable— estimated 2,000 poorly disciplined trainees.	All light infantry weapons.	Significance is large quantity of weapons and proximity to Saigon (3 miles). Commander, BGen Xuan is a dissident, a Buddhist, and close to BGen Chieu who is reportedly anti-regime.
Thu Duc Reserve Officers School	Highly variable— estimated 400.	Rifles and handguns.	Students may be ready for a coup, but their capability open to some question. Many are discontented for various reasons. Commander, Col Son, is exceptionally competent officer who was once not trusted by

			regime, but has been wooed recently. His present inclinations are unknown, but Son has the courage and ability to make him an important figure on whichever side he chooses.
Saigon Uniformed Police	4,500	Hand guns, light automatic weapons	Unknown, however, leaders are customarily responsive to direct orders from Palace.
Civil Guard	780	Rifles, light automatic weapons.	Unknown.

In addition to the above forces, there are regular Army units, more remote from Saigon, but which might be brought into the conflict.

III	8,608 (all believed to be within 50 miles of Saigon)	Conventional infantry including 105 mm Howitzers.	Unknown. Not predictable which units might follow the present leader. Actions of leader himself, BGen Dinh, not possible to predict. Normally his opportunism might lead one to expect him to leap to winning side, but he has recently become identified with regime. Next most influential officer in Division is Col Thieu who is Catholic and known as strong supporter of Nhu. Unit itself unknown, but commander BGen Cao idolizes Diem and has sworn to devote his life to supporting him. Cao is considered completely loyal to Diem.
IV	17,505 (estimated 8,850 within 50 miles of Saigon)	Conventional infantry including 105 mm Howitzers.	However, there is reason to question Cao's ability to command loyalty of subordinate units. Both his Deputy and his Chief of Staff are reported disaffected. BGen Khiem reportedly commands loyalty of several of the more influential officers in 7th Division, near Saigon. Khiem is reported to be strongly anti-Nhu, in spite of the fact that he is now serving as Chief of Staff of Joint General Staff.

¹ Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-172-69. Top Secret. There is no indication on the source text that the President saw this memorandum or chart. A copy of the chart is in the Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous.

² CIA telegram 0441 from Saigon, August 29. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET)

³ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

25. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) to the Secretary of State¹

Washington, August 30, 1963.

SUBJECT

Possible Diem-Nhu Moves and U.S. Responses

The courses of action which Diem and Nhu could take to maintain themselves in power and the United States responses thereto are as follows:

1.

Diem-Nhu Move: Preemptive arrest and assassination of opposition military officers and/or Vice President Tho.

U.S. Response:

- (a) We should continue to pass warnings to these officials about their danger.
- (b) CAS should explore the feasibility of prompt supply of a warning system to these officials.
- (c) If several general officers are arrested, we should invoke aid sanctions to obtain their release on the ground that they are essential to successful prosecution of the war against the Viet Cong.
- (d) Encouragement of prompt initiation of the coup is the best way of avoiding arrests and assassinations of generals.

2.

Diem-Nhu Move: Sudden switch in assignments of opposition generals or their dispatch on special missions outside of Saigon.

U.S. Response: We should recommend that the opposition generals delay in carrying out any such orders and move promptly to execution of the coup.

3.

Diem-Nhu Move: Declaration of Ambassador Lodge and/or other important American officials in Viet-Nam as personae non gratae.

U.S. Response:

- (a) We should stall on the removal of our officials until the efforts to mount a coup have borne fruit. This situation again shows the importance of speed on the part of both the U.S. and Vietnamese sides. We should also suspend aid.
- (b) Should the GVN begin to bring physical pressure on our personnel, we should introduce U.S. forces to safeguard their security.

4.

Diem-Nhu Move: Blackmail pressure on U.S. dependents in Viet-Nam, such as arrests, a few mysterious deaths or-more likely-disguised threats (like Nhu's recent threat to raze Saigon in case of a coup).

U.S. Response:

- (a) We should maintain our sangfroid with respect to threats.
- (b) We should urge American personnel to take such precautions as avoidance of unnecessary movement and concentration of families. We should also issue arms to selected American personnel.
- (c) We should demand the release of any Americans arrested and should insist for the record on proper protection of Americans by the GVN. (GVN failure to furnish this protection could serve as one of the justifications for open U.S. intervention.)
- (d) We should evacuate dependents and other nonofficial personnel at the earliest possible moment that Ambassador Lodge considers it consistent with the overall operation.
- (e) We should intervene with U.S. forces if necessary to protect Americans during evacuation and to obtain the release of those arrested.

5.

Diem-Nhu Move: Severance of all aid ties with the U.S., ouster of all U.S. personnel (except for a limited diplomatic staff), and demand for removal of all U.S.-controlled military equipment in Viet-Nam.

U.S. Response:

- (a) We should stall in removing U.S. personnel and equipment from Viet-Nam. This move by the GVN would again, however, underscore the necessity for speed in our counteraction.
- (b) If Diem-Nhu move to seize U.S.-controlled equipment, we should resist by all necessary force.

6.

Diem-Nhu Move: Political move toward the DRV (such as opening of neutralization negotiations), or rumors and indirect threats of such a move.

U.S. Response:

- (a) Ambassador Lodge should give Diem a clear warning of the dangers of such a course, and point out its continued pursuit will lead to cessation of U.S. aid.
- (b) Encourage the generals to move promptly with a coup.
- (c) We should publicize to the world at an appropriate moment any threats or move by Diem or Nhu toward the DRV in order to show the two-edged game they are playing and help justify publicly our counteractions.
- (d) If the DRV threatens to respond to an anti-Diem coup by sending troops openly to South Viet-Nam, we should let it know unequivocally that we shall hit the DRV with all that is necessary to force it to desist.
- (e) We should be prepared to take such military action.

7.

Diem-Nhu Move: Appeal to De Gaulle for political support for neutralization of Viet-Nam.

U.S. Response:

- (a) We should point out publicly that Viet-Nam cannot be effectively neutralized unless the Communists are removed from control of North Viet-Nam. If a coalition between Diem and the Communists is suggested, we should reply that this would be the avenue to a Communist take-over in view of the relative strength of the two principals in the coalition. Once an anti-Diem coup is started in South Viet-Nam, we can point to the obvious refusal of South Viet-Nam to accept a Diem-Communist coalition.

8.

Diem-Nhu Move: If hostilities start between the GVN and a coup group, Diem and Nhu will seek to negotiate in order to play for time (as during the November, 1960, coup attempt) and rally loyal forces to Saigon.

U.S. Response:

- (a) The U.S. must define its objective with crystal clearness. If we try to save Diem by encouraging negotiations between him and a coup group, while a coup is in progress, we shall greatly increase the risk of an unsuccessful outcome of the coup attempt. Our objective should, therefore, clearly be to bring the whole Ngo family under the control of the coup group.
- (b) We should warn the coup group to press any military advantage it gains to its logical conclusion without stopping to negotiate.
- (c) We should use all possible means to influence pro-Diem generals like Cao to move to the coup side. For example, General Harkins could send a direct message to Cao pointing to the consequences of a continued stand in support of the Ngo family and the advantage of shifting over to the coup group.
- (d) We should use, or encourage the coup group to use, military measures to prevent any loyal forces outside Saigon from rallying to Diem's support. For example, we can jam radio communications between Diem and these forces and we can encourage interdiction of transportation by blowing up bridges.
- (e) We should encourage the coup group to capture and remove promptly from Viet-Nam any members of the Ngo family outside Saigon, including Can and Thuc who are normally in Hue. We should assist in this operation to any extent necessary.

9.

Diem-Nhu Move: Continuation of hostilities in Saigon as long as possible in the hope that the U.S. will weaken because of the bloodbath which may involve U.S. personnel.

U.S. Response:

- (a) We should maintain our sangfroid and encourage the coup forces to continue the fight to the extent necessary.

- (b) We should seek to bring officers loyal to Diem over to our side by direct approaches by MACV or CAS inducements.
- (c) We should encourage the coup group to take necessary action to deprive the loyal forces of access to supplies.
- (d) We should make full use of any U.S. equipment available in Viet-Nam to assist the coup group.
- (e) If necessary, we should bring in U.S. combat forces to assist the coup group to achieve victory.

10.

Diem-Nhu Move: A Gotterdammerung in the Palace.

U.S. Response

- (a) We should encourage the coup group to fight the battle to the end and to destroy the Palace if necessary to gain victory.
- (b) Unconditional surrender should be the terms for the Ngo family since it will otherwise seek to outmaneuver both the coup forces and the U.S. If the family is taken alive, the Nhus should be banished to France or any other European country willing to receive them. Diem should be treated as the generals wish.

11.

Diem-Nhu Move: Flight out of the country (this is unlikely as it would not be in keeping with the past conduct of the Ngo family).

U.S. Response:

We should be prepared, with the knowledge of the coup group, to furnish a plane to take the Ngo family to France or other European country which will receive it. Under no circumstances should the Nhus be permitted to remain in Southeast Asia in close proximity to Viet-Nam because of the plots they will try to mount to regain power. If the generals decide to exile Diem, he should also be sent outside Southeast Asia.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Top Secret. Drafted by Mendenhall and

cleared in draft by Allen S. Whiting, Director of the Office of Research and Analysis for the Far East, Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

26. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, August 30, 1963—2:30 p.m.

SUBJECT

Viet-Nam

PARTICIPANTS

State Department

Secretary of State—in the Chair
Mr. Hilsman
Ambassador Nolting

White House

McGeorge Bundy
Mr. Forrestal

CIA

General Carter
Mr. Helms
Mr. Colby

Defense Department

Secretary McNamara
Mr. Gilpatric
Gen. Maxwell Taylor
Maj. Gen. Krulak
Secretary of Treasury Dillon
The Vice President
USIA—Mr. Edward Murrow

The discussion began by focussing on the apparent “inertia” on the part of the Generals as mentioned in paragraph 5 of Lodge's cable.²

The Secretary of Defense called attention to the cable reporting on the meeting with Lt. Col. Thao and expressed his feeling that the Thao plan was not worthy of serious consideration.³

Mr. Hilsman pointed out that the Generals had asked our opinion of Thao, expressing their distrust of him and that we had advised against their taking him into their confidence. This meeting might, therefore, have been their merely listening to him or an attempt by Thao to smoke out the opposition on behalf of Diem-Nhu.

Mr. Helms described what seemed to him to be Nhu's plan, as described in a recent TDCS⁴ —that is, to hold pro-government rallies, set up pro-

government Buddhist groups and, at a certain stage, pick off the opposition leaders; in general easing tensions and returning rapidly to the general posture of the GVN as of, say, August 20.⁵

The Secretary of State asked the question: "If the Generals do not intend to move and Diem-Nhu return to the August 20 posture, can we live with it?" Mr. Helms said that he did not know. It depended upon whether Mr. Nhu would reverse his course. Mr. Helms said that Mr. Colby probably knew Nhu better than anyone else and asked his opinion.

Mr. Colby said that Nhu would not "reverse" his course; that he might well ease tensions and produce the facade of August 20, but he would most certainly proceed with his "personalist revolution" and his "strategic hamlet society."

Ambassador Nolting said that Nhu was undoubtedly a shifty character but that he could assure everyone that Nhu would not really negotiate with Ho Chi Minh and would not move to a unification with North Vietnam; that he was committed to an anti-Communist course. He said that Nhu would undoubtedly pull shenanigans that would be difficult for the US, with Laos and with Cambodia and shenanigans that would, if anything, put the US into a harder confrontation with North Vietnam and with Communist China.

Mr. Hilsman said that the answer to the Secretary of State's question, in his opinion, depended on the attitude of the Vietnamese people and the prominence of Nhu in the weeks and months ahead. He felt that, if Nhu assumed a prominent role, say, by occupying the new office of Prime Minister, and the action against the pagodas went without retribution, the graph of the future would be a slow but steady deterioration downwards in which apathy in the army, a drifting off of junior officers and noncommissioned officers, possibly student and labor strikes would slowly but surely degrade the war effort. If, on the other hand, Madame Nhu went on a long vacation and brother Nhu faded into the background, it was possible that the graph would be slightly upwards from level—i.e., that progress might be made in the war against the Viet Cong but it would be much slower and less certain and take several years longer than the Secretary of Defense and he had contemplated at, say, the last Honolulu meeting.⁶

The Secretary of State then turned to the question of the De Gaulle statement⁷ and French activity.

Mr. Colby said that it was possible that Nhu had been working through the French talking to the DRV. General Carter said that the Secretary had asked for any hunches on the situation there, and although we lacked information because Harkins had as yet been unable to make his contacts with the Generals, he was prepared to offer the following hunch: that is, that Nhu has known of our machinations for the last two or three days; that the Generals are backing off; that Nhu also is backing off in the sense that he is trying to do what the US wants and to put the GVN in as favorable a posture as possible. General Carter's hunch was that the possibility of a Generals' coup is out; that in one week's time the GVN will look the same as it did as of the 20th of August; i.e. that Nhu will back off from repressive action in an attempt to give at least the appearance of a rapprochement with the US. General Carter said that there were several indications of this—the appointment of a new Ambassador,⁸ Madame Nhu's silence; the pro-government rallies; the surfacing of pro-government Buddhists; the creation of a new inter-sect committee; allowing Mau to go on leave; the release of the students; the reopening of the schools; the easing of the curfew; the return of Radio Saigon back to civilian control.

The Secretary of Defense said that in his opinion the Generals didn't have a plan and never did, contrary to their assurances.

After discussion it was made clear that the Generals did not say that they had a plan, but in their initial approach had said that they would develop one if they got US assurances. All agreed that from the evidence now available it looked as if the Generals were either backing off or were wallowing but that we could not know until after their meeting with Harkins. The Secretary of State said that the situation on Saturday⁹ appeared to be that the Vietnamese military wanted to mount a coup; that they wanted US assurances of support even though it would be a Vietnamese affair; that our response was that we would support them in an effort that was truly Vietnamese; that the main target was Nhu; and that the Generals could keep Diem if they desired. By this Saturday¹⁰ there does not appear to be much in it. The Secretary felt that we should send a cable to Lodge expressing these concerns, picking up the reference in Lodge's remark that nothing seemed to be happening.

The Secretary of State said that one contingency we should look at urgently, since it seemed to be the most likely one, was what we would do if the Generals' approach was only an exercise in frustration and gossip. Maybe the thing to do was to get the Generals back to fighting the war.

There was some discussion of counter-indicators, e.g., the possibility of riots, the reports of planned arrests of Generals and so on.

Mr. Nolting asked if the cable to Lodge ought not to withdraw some of the authority already delegated. He was especially thinking of the instruction that permitted Harkins to talk with the Generals.

Mr. Hilsman pointed out that Harkins was authorized to give assurances to the Generals and to review their planning but not to engage in planning with them.

The Secretary of Defense read the instructions to Harkins and all agreed that they were appropriate and should not be altered.^{[11](#)}

Mr. Hilsman pointed out that at some stage, but certainly not until we had the results of Harkins' meeting with the Generals, we would have to look at the question of whether we should cross over from assuring the Generals to a policy of forcing them into a position in which they had to take action, i.e., whether we could precipitate action by the Generals. The question here was whether the Generals had enough will and determination even to be forced. We could, however, know this only if we had more information.

The Secretary said we needed papers on a much wider range of contingencies. As he had said before, we needed a paper on the contingency if there is no coup attempt. What we needed is one list of the whole range of contingencies. One would be the frittering away of the interest of the Generals in a coup attempt. Another would be if their plan is inadequate in the US view for a successful coup.

The contingency paper dated August 30^{[12](#)} was distributed, and the Secretary of Defense said he thought the consolidated list of contingencies and US responses ought to eliminate any assumptions. In addition to those in the paper, which were based on the assumption that a coup would in fact be mounted, we ought to examine several more. One was that Diem and Nhu eased pressures either in arresting Generals

or arresting a few key ones. Another was that Diem-Nhu eased pressures and Nhu takes power with the title of Prime Minister. Another was that Diem-Nhu eased pressures and Nhu becomes less prominent.

The Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Mr. Gilpatric and others also suggested adding the following contingencies:

1. Political intervention by a third party, e.g., bringing the matter before the UN.
2. Pressure in the US to reduce aid unless Diem does things he is not now doing.
3. In the event of a successful coup—the slate of possible Ministers and the various forms that a government might take.
4. Request for a variety of US military help—from the use of helicopters ranging up to US troops.
5. Large scale civil disorders—from riots through civil war and including the sudden seizure of US communications centers and installations, including a set of these cables.
6. Increased Viet Cong activity in a variety of circumstances, including when the ARVN was split and possibly fighting among themselves.
7. DRV intervention into a chaotic situation—on its own initiative or by invitation.
8. Political activity outside Viet-Nam—e.g. Thailand, Ceylon and others having a regional meeting of Buddhist countries.
9. Difficulties between SVN and its neighbors—e.g. cutting off Mekong traffic to Cambodia as a result of withdrawal of recognition.

The papers requested above will be prepared as soon as possible and distributed piecemeal.

A meeting will be held at 11:00 tomorrow morning.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam, White House Meetings, State memcons. Top Secret; Eyes Only; No Distribution. Drafted by Hilsman. The meeting was held at the Department of State. There are two other records of this meeting: a memorandum of discussion by Bromley Smith, August 29 (*ibid.*, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda, Meetings on Vietnam) and a memorandum for the record by Krulak, August 30 (National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-172-69).

² Reference is to [Document 20](#). In Smith's record of the meeting, the deliberations began as follows:

"Secretary Rusk opened the meeting by requesting an analysis of reports received from the field estimating forces loyal to Diem and forces loyal to the generals' coup.

"General Taylor, in summary, said the Presidential Guard and Special Forces were on Diem's side. Other generals may or may not be loyal to Diem.

"Secretary Rusk reminded the group of its obligation to the President. It was not clear to him who we are dealing with and we were apparently operating in a jungle."

³ Reference is to [Document 22](#). In both Smith's and Krulak's records of the meeting, McNamara specifically states that General Harkins must get in touch with the Vietnamese generals to learn more. Smith also recounts McNamara stating that the United States should not give the generals support until Harkins makes contact with them.

⁴ Not further identified.

⁵ Both Smith and Krulak stated that Helms believed that the CIA had no evidence that would suggest that the generals had a plan. According to Smith, Helms also stated that "it appears that Colonel Tho [Thao] is being looked to to do the coup planning." Krulak recounts that Helms found "the Thao report most disquieting to him."

⁶ Regarding the Secretary of Defense's conference in Honolulu, May 6, see [vol. III, pp. 264-270](#).

⁷ On August 29, French President Charles De Gaulle made a statement on Vietnam at a meeting of the French Council of Ministers. At the close of the Council meeting, the French Minister of Information, Alain Peyrefitte, read the statement to news correspondents. The statement reads in part as follows: "France's knowledge of the merits of this people makes her appreciate the role they would be capable of playing in the current situation in Asia for their own progress and to further international understanding, once they could go ahead with their activities independently of the outside, in internal peace and unity and in harmony with their neighbors. Today more than ever, this is what France wishes for Vietnam as a whole. Naturally it is up to this people, and to them alone, to choose the means of achieving it, but any national effort that would be carried out in Vietnam would find France ready, to the extent of her own possibilities, to establish cordial cooperation with

this country." The full text is printed in *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1963*, p. 869.

⁸ The new Vietnamese Ambassador to the United States, Do Vang Ly.

⁹ August 24.

¹⁰ August 31.

¹¹ Not found.

¹² Document 25.

27. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, August 30, 1963, 7 p.m.

304. CINCPAC for POLAD. Called on Lalouette, the French Ambassador. He has been here five years; is intelligent; and has the reputation of sincerely favoring U.S. program here. He expressed himself as follows:

Diem has a steadfastness and determination which is rare in Asia and is valuable. In many ways he is the best Chief of State in Southeast Asia. His weakness is that he is not a political leader, cannot make speeches, cultivate the press, etc.

He is much better off with Nhu than without him. Nhu is efficient and intelligent. The war against the Viet Cong can be won with Diem administration in office.

The present situation is largely the work of the press, helped greatly by Vietnamese ineptness. In the days of French administration, suicides of Buddhists were very common and had no effect whatever on the population. They create much more excitement abroad than they do in Vietnam.

Things are now quieting down; Buddhists are being released. Decree Law No. 10 will be repealed. The pagodas will be repaired at government expense; a ceremony is planned to be held at the Xa Loi Pagoda.

Madame Nhu will soon go away for several months on a trip to India and the United States.

The Vietnamese officials have been waiting for a dialogue to begin with me which has not taken place. They are, therefore, fuming in on themselves, which is bad. My comment: This is not strictly true. In my conversations with both Diem and Nhu, I suggested a number of things which should be done.

There is still some danger of a violent uprising, but it is getting less.

He asked: What could be done to please U.S. I said: Get rid of the Nhus. He said: This is impossible, but it might be possible to bring in someone with titles of Prime Minister and reduce Nhu's role.

In a year or two the guerrilla danger might be ended. The Viet Cong are very discouraged and morale is very low in North Vietnam, concerning which he said he was well informed inasmuch as the French have a mission there. When the guerrilla war is ended, it might be possible for the South Vietnamese, who would then be much stronger than the North Vietnamese, to propose trading some of their rice for North Vietnamese coal. This might lead towards a unified Vietnam with South Vietnam the dominant element. But all of this was remote.

When I left, he said: Let me say two things—first, try to calm American opinion and, second, no coupe.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET. Secret; Eyes Only; Limit Distribution. Received at 3:16 p.m. Repeated to CINCPAC and passed by the Department of State to the White House, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the CIA.

28. Memorandum of a Conversation¹

Washington, August 30, 1963, 5 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

French

Ambassador Alphand
M. Pierre Pelen

U.S.

The Secretary
Mr. Richard H. Davis, Deputy Assistant Secretary, EUR
Mr. Iohannes V. Imhof. WE

Ambassador Alphand called on the Secretary at 5:00 p.m. on August 30. One of the subjects discussed was:

Vietnam

The Secretary said that the press both here and in France was giving the impression that Ambassador Alphand had been summoned to this meeting because of General De Gaulle's statement on Vietnam.² The Secretary said that this was obviously not true and that it was desirable to correct this impression. Ambassador Alphand agreed. He said that while he had not seen the final version of the French statement on Vietnam right after it had been made, he had seen initial drafts two weeks ago while he was still in Paris. He said that in essence the statement reiterated the points which General De Gaulle had made in his meeting with the President in the spring of 1961.³ The French did not feel that a military solution could work.

The Secretary said that it was the other side which is seeking to impose a military solution. We did not seek South Vietnam as an ally and we would be perfectly happy if it were truly nonaligned as many other countries are. However, the facts of the situation were that Communist guerrillas supported from the North were seeking to subjugate the country. This we had to resist. Ambassador Alphand said that he appreciated this position. Certainly the French had no immediate solution to the problem. General de Gaulle's statement was intended merely as a

long term proposition, not as something that could be put into effect in the near future.

The Secretary noted that France had a delegation in Hanoi. He said he hoped the French would let us have some of the information which the French delegation developed there. Ambassador Alphand promised to look into this. He said that he had read an article in a recent USIA publication comparing the positions of Mao Tse Tung and Ho Chi Minh on the situation in Vietnam. Mao, according to this publication, was for the continuation and intensification of the war, while Ho was for peace. Ambassador Alphand said that the French agreed with this analysis and he suggested that it would be useful to compare notes on the respective positions of Mao and Ho.

The Secretary said the Soviets had recently created the impression in connection with Laos that they had not much influence in Southeast Asia. This might be true; on the other hand, it was also possible that the Soviets wanted us to believe that this was so. Ambassador Alphand was inclined to believe that the Soviets had in fact little influence in the area. On the other hand, Ho Chi Minh was basically anti-Chinese. A neutral solution for Vietnam was therefore possible and might be the best solution. The Secretary repeated that we had been drawn into the conflict because of Viet [Cong?] activity. There was as yet no indication that a truly neutral Vietnam was possible. A false neutrality would be most dangerous as it would have repercussions on Vietnam's neighbors, especially on Indonesia.

Ambassador Alphand said the present situation was most difficult. He felt Diem was undesirable; however, there was nobody in sight to replace him. The Secretary said the main problem seemed to be Diem's brother Nhu and he wondered whether the enticements of Paris could not be offered to him. Ambassador Alphand said that Nhu's father was going to Paris, but there were no indications that Nhu himself planned to retire.

Ambassador Alphand, while admitting that the neutral solution was not as yet effective in Laos, said that at least it has stopped the war there. The Secretary said the situation in Laos was different. If every foreigner really left Laos it was quite possible that there could be no internal security problem and that the country would not create problems for any of its neighbors. The same was not necessarily true of a unified Vietnam. The Vietnamese are more active and ambitious and might create problems.

Ambassador Alphan said he planned to emphasize to the press that it was absurd to think that France was looking for an arrangement with Diem or was trying to extend her influence at the expense of the U.S. The Secretary suggested that the Ambassador might point out that De Gaulle's declaration represented long-term views. Ambassador Alphan agreed.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET. Secret. Drafted by Imhof. The meeting was held at the Department of State.

² See [footnote 7](#), [Document 26](#).

³ President Kennedy visited France May 31-June 2, 1961. Records of his conversations with President Charles De Gaulle are in Department of State, Conference Files: Lot 66 D 110, CF 1891.

29. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, August 30, 1963—6:08 p.m.

TELEPHONE CALL FROM MR. BUNDY

Sec returned the call and B asked if Sec had fun with Alphant.² Sec said he claims and he will say to the press this was a long-term view and it is almost what our Pres said in 1961 re Viet-Nam.³ B asked if Sec has seen Lodge's report on his call on French Ambassador Lalouette.⁴ Sec said yes. B thinks it is interesting and raised the question of whether Cabot should talk to these people more concretely than he has especially if the other plan is a fallen balloon. B said we can't settle it tonight but thought he would mention it. We may need this channel. B does not think he has told them very much except we are disturbed. We will reread them. This is one subject that was not discussed this p.m. Sec mentioned Madame Nhu's coming here. Agreed this is ominous. B said if Cabot told the French Amb they should go that went to the Nhus. Sec will study it this evening and B will too. Meeting tomorrow at 11.

¹ Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Phyllis D. Bernau.

² See [*Supra*](#).

³ Apparent reference to Kennedy's letter to Diem, December 14, 1961; see [vol. I, p. 736](#) .

⁴ See [Document 27](#).

30. Memorandum From the Director of the Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff (Riley) to the President¹

Washington, August 30, 1963.

DJSM-1463-63

SUBJECT

Availability of Forces for Deployment to Saigon

Three Marine BLT's, totaling 4,500 men, have been positioned with necessary sea and airlift so that the three reinforced battalions and command elements can close Saigon in 24 hours. Initial heliborne elements from TF 76.5 would close Saigon in two hours.

- a. One BLT, at sea, can close Saigon in eight hours, with initial elements arriving in two hours. This BLT is now located 50 miles East of Cap St Jacques (70 miles from Saigon). With advance warning, as tensions increase, this force can be moved closer to shore and reaction times reduced accordingly.
- b. Two BLT's are on a four hour alert with associated airlift at Okinawa, 6:40 flying hours from Saigon.

One additional Marine BLT afloat has been directed to a position off Vietnam and will be on station in approximately six days.

For backup, there are two additional battalions on Okinawa: one Marine BLT and one battalion of the 173d Airborne Brigade. This backup force totals 2,700 men.

Herbert D. Riley
Vice Admiral, USN

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Files, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret. A note on the source text indicates that this memorandum was taken from the President's Reading File, dated August 31.

31. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, August 30, 1963—8:30 p.m.

284. Eyes only for Ambassador. Following is report to you on today's meeting which reviewed your 383² 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 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.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Emergency. Drafted by Rusk and cleared with Hilsman, Krulak, and Forrestal. Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD exclusive for Felt.

² Document 20.

32. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, August 31, 1963—2:39 a.m.

0499. This particular coup is finished. General Harkins cabling General Taylor results this morning's conversation with General Khiem.² Summary of Khiem's statements is to effect that Generals did not feel ready and did not have sufficient balance of forces. They had talked with Nhu yesterday and he has assured them that SVN would be able continue the war, finding means to do so where it could. Generals thinking of proposing to Diem that he bring senior officers into certain Cabinet positions with Nhu in charge of Cabinet, i.e., a kind of prime ministerial role. Harkins' judgment is that Generals were not ready and could not achieve balance of forces favorable to them.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Eyes Only; Operational Immediate. The source text is a copy the CIA sent to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 4:47 a.m.

² *Infra.*

33. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Saigon, August 31, 1963—1:45 p.m.

MAC 1583. Request that a copy be passed to State, CIA, and other interested agencies.

On instructions from Ambassador had a talk with Brig Gen Khiem, Chief JGS, this morning. Purpose was to give assurance of U.S. backing as per State 272.²

Khiem was at first reluctant to say anything, indicating he was just a junior officer and that I should talk to Big Minh who was really the head guy.

I said I would be delighted to talk to Big Minh, but he had put the word that no Americans were to contact him.

He stated Big Minh had stopped planning at this time, and was working on other methods—these he did not elaborate on.

He said because Big Minh had called off the planning so had others mentioning only himself and Gen Khanh.

He said all concerned had such a respect for Big Minh they followed his direction.

Asked where Col Thao, CAS 0483,³ stood in the picture. Khiem replied he knew Thao was making plans-but that few of military trusted him because of his V.C. background—and that he might still be working for the V.C. *Comment:* This might be an indicator of the other method, but this just conjecture.

Then he went on to say the Generals were not ready as they did not have enough forces under their control compared to those under President and now in Saigon.

He indicated they, the Generals, did not want to start anything they could not successfully finish.

Khiem then said Gen Don was not in Big Minh's confidence. Comment: Probably because of Don's present position because they are not personal friends.

At a meeting yesterday, Mr. Nhu said he now went along with everything the U.S. wants to do, and even had the backing of President Kennedy. I said this was news to me. Khiem said he wondered if Nhu is again trying to flush out the Generals. He intimated the Generals do not have too much trust in Nhu and that he's such a friend of Mr. Richardson (CAS), the Generals wonder if Mr Nhu and Madame Nhu were on the CIA payroll. *Comment:* (A new angle indeed).

He also stated Big Minh and others could not put too much backing on Mr Connie's⁴ word as representing U.S. because he was low in position in CAS. It would take someone like myself or Ambassador Lodge to give them complete confidence. Though it was my purpose to do just that—in view of what Khiem had already admitted I decided not to—and told Khiem that I would be glad to talk to Big Minh. But we would have to arrange the meeting. He said he would. No date set.

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

He did say that Gen Don was going to present a plan to the President next week with the backing of the Generals. This was similar to one I had heard mentioned before; that of placing three Generals in key Cabinet positions, Interior, Defense, and DGI. Nhu would get some job such as Chief of Cabinet or a government coordinator.

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

Maybe my meeting with Big Minh, if it occurs, will smoke out other ghosts.

Regards. Ambassador Lodge has seen.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to CINCPAC exclusive for Felt. A note on the source text indicates the President read this telegram. The source text is a copy Krulak sent to the White House for Bundy; Krulak also sent copies to the Department of State for Rusk, *Ball*, Harriman, and Hilsman; to CIA for Helms; to the Army for General Wheeler; to the Navy for Admiral MacDonald; and to the Marine Corps for General Shoup. A summary version of this cable is printed in *Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition*, vol. 11, pp. 740-741.

² Document 16.

³ Document 22.

⁴ Reference is to Conein.

34. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, August 31, 1963, 6 p.m.

391. Eyes only for Secretary. CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Admiral Felt. Deptel 284.²

1.

You will have seen Harkins' report³ 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 indeterminate date in the future [if?] 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 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 has 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 on 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)⁴ he gave a lunch at which were present the Papal Delegate and the Italian and Australian Ambassadors. After the Australian had gone Lalouette said: "We must save the family", as though the family were the first consideration.
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 Viet-Nam 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 our 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.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Operational Immediate. Received at 7:16 a.m. Repeated Operational Immediate to CINCPAC. Relayed by the Department of State to the White House, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the CIA. Another copy of this telegram has a marginal note indicating that the President saw it. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables)

² Document 31.

³ *Supra.*

⁴ See [Document 27](#).

35. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, August 31, 1963—9:55 a.m.

TELEPHONE CALL FROM MR. BUNDY (WH)

Mr. Bundy said it was very fortunate the Sec has rewritten the message to Saigon.² The Sec. said even our hunches were better than we had a right to expect. The Sec. said the mtg. here at eleven o'clock³ this morning would be largely a political one. Bundy said there was no reason for cutting back in numbers; we would have one more meeting and then have the military. The Sec. asked if he should call the Vice President. Bundy said to tell him it was no longer an emergency and it wasn't necessary that he come. Dillon had gone to the country.

Bundy said he had spoken briefly with the Pres and either the Pres would call here around 11:30 or vice versa. The Sec. said another hunch he had was the French involvement. The Sec. said he would call the Vice Pres.

(The Pres. called Mr. Bundy during the mtg c 11:30 and Mr. Bundy gave him a report on the mtg.)

¹ Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Mildred Asbjornson.

² Apparent reference to [Document 31](#).

³ See [Document 37](#).

36. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Harriman)¹

Washington, August 31, 1963—10:15 a.m.

TELEPHONE CALL FROM AMB. HARRIMAN

Amb. Harriman said he would come back to Washington if need be. He did not think events entirely surprising (Vietnam). He thought we should go back to the program we recommended a week ago,² and have it out. He thought we should tell Diem what we were going to do and stick to it. We had gone through the same thing with Phoumi.³ Harriman asked if the Sec had seen Kattenburg. The Sec said he had but that Kattenburg's report⁴ was already out of date in some important respects.

The Sec. said either he or Mr. Hilsman would be in touch with Amb. Harriman later in the day.

¹ Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Mildred Asbjornson.

² Apparent reference to telegram 243 to Saigon, [vol. III, p. 628](#) .

³ Reference is to Harriman's efforts to convince Phoumi Nosovan to cooperate with U.S. support of a neutralized Laos.

⁴ Rusk apparently is referring to Kattenburg's point of view, set forth in the memorandum of conversation [infra](#).

37. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, August 31, 1963, 11 a.m.

SUBJECT

Viet-Nam

PARTICIPANTS

Department of State

Secretary of State
Mr. Hilsman
Amb. Nolting
Mr. Kattenburg

Department of Defense

Secretary McNamara
Mr. Gilpatric
Gen. Maxwell Taylor
Maj. Gen. Krulak

White House

McGeorge Bundy
Mr Forrestal

CIA

Gen. Carter
Mr. Helms
Mr. Colby

The Vice President

USIA—Mr. Edward Murrow

The Secretary of State began the meeting by saying that we were back to Wednesday of last week.² He suggested that we go to the original problem: What factors made us think well of a coup? These factors were still relevant to our basic problem. He felt that we should not rule out our attitude towards Nhu as an individual. The problem is what Diem-Nhu did, the policies they followed that eroded solidarity in Viet-Nam for pursuing the war, international support, and US public opinion.

The Secretary of State said that we should consider a message to Lodge picking up his suggestion³ of telling Diem the problem in the US of continuing support and opening a discussion with Lodge as to what we should get [from?] the Government of South Viet-Nam with respect to the following: Buddhists, students, the military command, free scope for US advisers, and Madame Nhu out of the country on a visit. Additional

measures might be a real effort to patch up relations with neighboring countries including Cambodia—in other words, a total program to achieve what the Nhus were undercutting. The Secretary was reluctant to start by saying that the number one problem was removing Nhu. He was also clear that engineering a coup ourselves was something we could not do.

The Secretary of Defense said that he strongly favored the Secretary of State's ideas. He felt that the initial step was to reestablish relations between US representatives and their opposite numbers in the GVN, and especially Lodge and Harkins with Diem.

The Secretary of State said that an extremely important item to tell Diem was that he must not decapitate the military command because of rumors of a coup attempt but get on with the war.

The Secretary asked if anyone had any doubts that the coup was off. Mr. Kattenburg said that he had some doubts. He said that the VOA broadcast of suspension of aid⁴ had had a most remarkable effect and that it was an enormous pity that this effect was counteracted by a too rapid pull-back from that broadcast the next day. Mr. Kattenburg said that the Generals were very, very suspicious of the US and needed the reassurances they had asked for but had never gotten. In this respect it was tragic⁵ that Harkins had not carried out his instructions, i.e., had not given Khiem the reassurances even though Khiem had said that the plotting had stopped. The Secretaries of State and Defense said that they thought that Harkins was absolutely right to stop before giving reassurances in the light of what Khiem had told him.

Mr. Hilsman said that he quite agreed that Harkins was right in not following through with reassurances. He thought that what Mr. Kattenburg meant by what he had said was that the Generals' need for reassurances that the US was really behind them was a crucial factor. Whether or not it was true, the Generals believed that the authors of the 1960 coup had been encouraged in their action by low level CAS people in violation of US Government policy. On this occasion the Generals had been contacted only by two low level CAS people and they feared a repetition of 1960. Their suspiciousness was enhanced by the close relationship Richardson, the CAS Station Chief, has had with brother Nhu. Against this background, they tended to believe what Nhu had told them—that he was in communication with the US, that he was

doing what the US wanted him to do and that he had had the approval of President Kennedy.

Mr. Hilsman asked the Secretary of State if he could pick up the Secretary's suggestion of getting back to the basic factors in the situation and give his analysis of them. Mr. Hilsman said that there were four factors in the basic problem. The first factor was the attitude of the people and especially of the middle level officers and bureaucrats who would have to carry on the war under any government.

Mr. McNamara asked why Mr. Hilsman thought this was key and what evidence he had that these people were in fact disaffected. Mr. Hilsman distinguished between what we knew of the attitude of these people and why they were key. He felt that they were key because they were the ones who had to carry on the activities of the government. (What Mr. Hilsman should have said explicitly but only implied was that of his four factors the reason he had put this one first was that pursuing the war to a successful conclusion was the most important of all and that doing this required the cooperation and support of the middle level officers and bureaucrats.)

On the question of evidence of the attitude of these people, we had relatively little information and certainly no statistics. However, we had some information from conversations between these people and Embassy officials.

Mr. Kattenburg said that he felt that they were disaffected, that he himself had talked to only three such people who were, but that other Embassy officers had talked to others who were. Also, Mr. Kattenburg said, we must consider as valid evidence the testimony of seasoned newspapermen such as Trumbull and Keyes Beech who talked to these people and who uniformly reported disaffection. The Secretary of Defense felt that this reflected that the disaffected people that we had talked to were only those in Saigon.

Mr. Hilsman said that his second factor was the effect of an American acquiescence in what had happened in Viet-Nam especially in Southeast Asia but also in Korea where they were watching us closely to see how much repression we would tolerate as a guide to the repression they contemplated during their upcoming election.

The third factor was Mr. Nhu. We had the experience of his attempting to throw out the key American advisers in the provinces and the

strategic hamlet program. This would undoubtedly be revived. Also Ambassador Nolting had said Nhu would engage in shenanigans in Laos and Cambodia. Mr. Hilsman said he thought he would also do so with the North Vietnamese and we knew he had been in contact with them some months ago. Mr. Hilsman said that sensitive information showed that Nhu had been behind the De Gaulle statement, at least to the extent that what he had told the French Ambassador gave De Gaulle the notion.

The fourth factor was US domestic opinion and world opinion.

Mr. Hilsman said that his recommendation was we now move to the political and diplomatic arena; that we open tough negotiations with President Diem, maintaining with him and publicly our position of disapproval of recent actions; that we ought to consider telling Diem that we had temporarily suspended aid pending the outcome of these negotiations; that this was not an ultimatum but only a position for negotiations to bring about a GVN posture that would permit us to continue our support. This move had the advantage of giving Lodge some leverage, of signaling the rest of Asia that we were not condoning GVN actions and also help with domestic public opinion. Most importantly of all, however, it would signal to the rest of Viet-Nam that we were doing our utmost to change the nature of GVN policies. We would then negotiate with Diem for an acceptable arrangement. The disadvantage was that it would interrupt the momentum of the war effort, but this had perhaps already happened. The Secretary of State said he would not exaggerate what Nhu said to the French, that was not exactly treasonable and, if it was, we have been a little treasonable too.

The Secretary said that we should look at the things that we wanted to extract from these negotiations. It might well be that the effect of the transaction would be wholesome in getting more cooperation from South Viet-Nam. They might have had a scare during these recent days too.

The Secretary was not inclined to start with an actual suspension of aid but a statement that without GVN changes it might not be possible to continue aid. On the question of international opinion as a result of the repression of the last few weeks, this might be turned around if there was in fact a turn-around by the GVN. On Vietnamese opinion, his feeling was that the disaffection had not yet spilt outside Saigon but, if the policies of repression continued, then the disaffection would seep out.

Mr. Nolting said that this was not a problem of religious persecution, that the Buddhists had never been persecuted, that the line should be that the action against the Buddhists was not religious persecution but to remove political efforts under the cloak of Buddhism. The Secretary said that this was impossible for us to maintain and he was not at all sure it was true, but that if there was anything to what Mr. Nolting said it would have to come out of the actions of conciliation the GVN now took.

Mr. Murrow said that there had been world-wide condemnation of GVN actions; that if US policy implied that we continued to support such a government without complaint the world would blame us for supporting both the GVN and its action if its actions continued bad, as, for example, the censorship remained in force. Mr. Murrow's point was that it would be no easy task to turn around world opinion.

The Secretary of Defense said that we must work out a way of continuing to help the GVN against the Viet Cong. He agreed that it should not start with a suspension of aid. We need to reopen communications with Diem to get his ideas about what comes next. He said that part of the problem was the press-an assumption that the US was willing to change the situation when in fact it may not be able to change the situation.

Mr. Kattenburg said that his feeling, and he felt Lodge's and Trueheart's was that if we acquiesce in what has happened or even if we acquiesce with halfway measures—i.e., GVN negotiations with puppet bonzes—we will be butted out of the country within six months to a year⁶ and he felt that it would be better to withdraw in a dignified way.

Mr. Bundy asked what was behind this conclusion. Mr. Kattenburg said that the recent actions of the GVN have made the people the unwilling allies of the Viet Cong; that he had known Diem for 10 years and admired him, but that he had fumed into a petty dictator inseparable from Nhu and that the general expectation in South Viet-Nam would be that the Viet Cong would win.

Ambassador Nolting said that the discontent was confined to the cities which was only 15 percent of the population; the villagers were not affected. The feeling in the cities is worse now than ever before but not that much worse. The government had actually done well with US help that had begun in 1961 and though this was a bad period he felt the government could succeed. Mr. Kattenburg said that there was one new

factor. The population was in high hopes following the VOA broadcast but could do nothing because of the many guns in the street. If we patch up with Diem and Nhu, we may survive for a few months but popular discontent will crescendo. The Secretary of State said that this was speculation. We must start with the situation we are now facing. He felt that we, first, should decide that we will not pull out of Viet-Nam and, second, that the US is not going to operate a coup d'etat itself. We were making steady progress during the first six months of this year and what we should do is go down the middle of the track and hope to recover that.

The Vice President said that he agreed. He recognized the evils of Diem but has seen no alternative to him. Certainly we can't pull out. We must reestablish ourselves and stop playing cops and robbers. We might cut down on aid and tell Diem that he had created a situation which we cannot handle politically and he must do 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. Certainly the US itself could not pull a coup and certainly there were bad situations in South Viet-Nam. However, there were bad situations in the US. It was difficult to live with Otto Passman but we couldn't pull a coup on him.⁷

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, White House Meetings, State Memcons. Top Secret; Eyes Only; No Distribution. Drafted by Hilsman. The meeting was held at the Department of State. Krulak's memorandum of this meeting is printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, pp. 540-544. A brief memorandum of discussion of this meeting by Bromley Smith is in Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda, Meetings on Vietnam.

² August 21.

³ See [Document 34](#).

⁴ See [vol. III, p. 636](#) .

⁵ Hilsman added the following change in his own hand: "it should be noted," which was apparently intended to replace "it was tragic."

⁶ Kattenburg later stated that Lodge specifically asked him, if he got the chance, to make this point. (Department of State, Office of the Historian, Vietnam Interviews, Paul M. Kattenburg, March 14, 1984)

⁷ Regarding Vice President Johnson's remarks, Smith's memorandum of discussion reads as follows:

"The Vice President stated his view that he had not known of U.S. actions taken last Saturday until the following Tuesday meeting. He had never been sympathetic with our proposal to produce a change of government in Vietnam by means of plotting with Vietnamese generals. Now that the generals had failed to organize a coup, he thought that we ought to reestablish ties to the Diem government as quickly as possible and get forward with the war against the Viet Cong."

38. Memorandum of Conversation Between the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, August 31, 1963, noon.

SUBJECT
Viet-Nam

*The Cable*²

The important thing is to win the war. It is important to maintain the leverage of US discontent both in our public posture and in our private conversations with Diem. We want to go to Diem with a frank but tough line. We must insist he lay off the Generals and not arrest them and we must be blunt about this. We must return to the situation before the 24th of August. Diem ought to have a dialogue with the real Buddhists (Nolting suggested the venerable Khiet as a possibility). We ought to hit hard on press censorship. Lodge ought to open his conversations with Diem by saying that he has come to talk. The US is troubled and these are the reasons. The conversation ought to close with the problem of the Nhus. This could be settled in later discussions—leave them till last. Our sanction is that Congress may have to force us to suspend aid. The President at his next press conference would have to express his disapproval of what has happened in Viet-Nam. One reason for this is that the US continues to suffer casualties in Viet-Nam—e.g., *The New York Times* today juxtapositions the repression of the Buddhists and the US disapproval of GVN actions with a story of two more Americans killed. Diem must face these facts. Diem will say that public opinion and Congress don't understand the true situation because of erroneous press reports but our reply should be tant pis. The fact is thus what they believe, whether the information they base their conclusion on is right or wrong. Lodge should not say that aid has been suspended but that suspension is around the bend and will be forced upon us. We must establish a posture of candid and critical discussion privately and also this should be the general impression publicly both in Viet-Nam and abroad. If the people of South Viet-Nam decide to make a change of government they know where we are. Diem knows where we are too if he wants to change his policies. The impression should be left with the

people of South Viet-Nam that we are there trying not to operate a coup d'etat on the government but to improve the government.⁴

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries, Vietnam. Top Secret, Eyes Only; No Distribution. Hilsman wrote "post mortem" on the first page of the source text. He also attached two pages of fragmentary handwritten notes which are neither decipherable nor comprehensible. They are not printed.

² The reference is not clear, but may be to telegram 243, [vol. III, p. 628](#) .

⁴ Hilsman wrote the following note at the end of the source text: "1st para—require conciliatory actions which are attributed [?] to him personally, a system of his [?] efforts to improve his int'l position, and a demonstrat. to Amer. people that we are not asking Americans to be killed to support [?] Mde Nhu's desire to barbecue bonzes."

39. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, August 31, 1963—10:48 p.m.

294. Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge. Re your 391,² 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 pulling. 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. 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.

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 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 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.
4. Removal of press censorship.

At some stage, you will wish to talk about future relationships between 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 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 in order to get on with the task.

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. 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.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Emergency. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared with Forrestal and in draft with Rusk. Repeated to CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Felt.

² Document 34.

40. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Saigon, August 31, 1963—10:49 p.m.

295. For Ambassador Lodge from the Secretary. Re Deptel 294.² 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-inside Viet-Nam and 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 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.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Emergency; Eyes Only. Drafted by Rusk and approved by Hilsman. Repeated to CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Felt.

² *Supra*.

41. Memorandum From the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hughes) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)¹

Washington, August 31, 1963.

SUBJECT

US Assurances to the Generals

During the period August 22-30 inclusive, the Generals were given the following assurances:

1. On August 26 Generals Khiem and Khanh were assured by Conein and *[less than 1 line not declassified]* respectively that the US would provide direct support during the interim period of breakdown of the central government mechanism. (*[document number not declassified]*)²
2. On August 27 Conein assured General Khiem that the US would do all in its power to assist the families of the generals engaged in the coup plot in the event of its failure. At the same meeting Khiem was promised a complete inventory of ordnance in stock at Long Thanh training camp. (*[document number not declassified]*)³
3. On August 28, CAS gave General Khiem the complete ordnance list and sketch of Long Thanh showing weapons emplacements, as assurance of US intentions, since the plan was provided for the purpose of attack on Colonel Tung's camp. (*[document number not declassified]*)⁴
4. On August 29 Rufus Phillips assured General Kim, on authority of the Ambassador, that the CAS approach in a meeting earlier that morning with Generals Minh and Khiem was bona fide and had the Ambassador's complete blessing. General Kim noted this was all the generals needed (in the way of assurances) but that General Minh needed US help in planning and that CAS should contact General Khiem on the morning of August 30. Phillips got the impression that Kim wanted not only help in planning but something further on what support the US would give. The Ambassador authorized the contact and the offer of help in planning.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam. Top Secret.

² vol. III, p. 642.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 653.

⁴ Document 23.

42. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 1, 1963, 7 p.m.

393. Eyes only for Secretary. CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Admiral Felt. ReDeptel 294 and 295.²

1. Your 295 states the issue admirably.
2. I agree that we must keep our eyes fixed on main purpose of our presence in South Vietnam which at the very least is to deny this area to the Communists and, hopefully, also to transform South Vietnam into a country strong enough to stand by itself. It is for these enormously important reasons that we are asking our fellow citizens to risk their lives.
3. I also agree that GVN and Nhus have made it much harder to achieve this purpose and that a continuation of the status quo may make it impossible to achieve.
4. I do not, however, exclude the possibility that an improved situation can be created if Madame Nhu and Archbishop Thuc could leave the country; if Nhu is restricted to work on Strategic Hamlet Program, if the post of Prime Minister is created with Thuan as Prime Minister, and if I get on a footing with the GVN in which I try to influence them to act like responsible political leaders in the best sense of the word. In addition I should get assurance of repeal of Decree Law Number Ten, restoration of damaged pagodas, release of students, and Buddhist prisoners, reopening of closed universities, removal of press censorship, and negotiation with true Buddhist leaders on implementation of June 16 agreement.³

[Numbered paragraph 5 (3-1/2 lines) not declassified]

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 8:37 a.m. and passed to the White House, CIA, and Department of Defense at 9:01 a.m. On another copy of this telegram there is an indication that the President

read it. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables, Part I)

² Documents 39 and [40](#).

³ See [vol. III, p. 397](#) .

43. Telegram From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President, at Hyannis Port, Massachusetts¹

Washington, September 1, 1963—2:05 p.m.

CAP 63475. There follows a draft statement on South Vietnam for use in Cronkite interview.² This draft has been discussed with Hilsman and Forrestal who concur in general. It is being circulated to Rusk, McNamara and Lodge, and we will know their views early Monday morning.³

Second following document is a set of possible comments on the French statement.⁴ It has been a pleasure to draft them, but I continue to think they should not be used. In particular, the possibility of a reference to French position in Laos has been discussed with Harriman who strongly advises against it. Argument is that we really do not want larger French presence in Laos, where French military missions have been most unhelpful, and that any linkage of Laos with South Vietnam raises specter of neutralist solution. More generally, we find only our own personal irritation as an argument against well-established conclusion that we do best when we ignore Nosey Charlie.

A. Draft comment on South Vietnam for Cronkite interview

The difficulties in South Vietnam are serious, but it is important to keep the issues clear.

1. We agree with the Government of South Vietnam on many central issues. We both want to see South Vietnam strong and free. We both want to defeat the brutal and aggressive effort of the Communists to take the country over by force. So we both support the campaign against the Communists. We both support the Strategic Hamlet Program, which has the double purpose of assisting self-defense in the villages and promoting strong programs of economic and social development. It is important not to forget that President Diem has in the past given outstanding leadership to his people at a time when many of those in the West who had most experience in the country thought that everything was lost.

2. Yet now there are serious differences with the Government of South Vietnam over certain acts of arbitrary power, some of them strongly repressive, which that government has allowed. Our difficulty over such acts is double: First, as a democratic people, we cannot approve of this kind of repression in a situation in which we are closely engaged and where our resources provide much of the government's strength. Second, we believe that such acts undermine the unity of the people of the country, weaken confidence in the government, and so play into the hands of the Communists.
3. We have an obligation to make our position clear on this matter, and we certainly cannot approve such acts of repression. Our concern and our sense of the urgent need for improvement are being continuously communicated to the Vietnamese Government.
4. The larger question of the shape and structure of the Vietnamese Government is one for the Vietnamese people themselves. The interest of the United States here is that the Government of South Vietnam be able to secure the effective support of its people in defending the freedom of the country. We are making a large effort in South Vietnam, where approximately 35 thousand American troops have served since General Taylor's mission in 1961,⁵ and where 46 American lives have been lost by hostile action. It is hard to see how we could continue this effort if the essential conditions for success were no longer present.
5. But it is too soon to conclude that we cannot find a good way out of the present difficulties. Our support for the people of South Vietnam against the Communist aggressors will continue as long as it is wanted and can be effective.

B. Alternative comments on General De Gaulle's statement, for possible use on Monday TV interview

1. We have noted the French statement. General De Gaulle expressed similar views to the President in 1961 in Paris,⁶ but at that time it was his conviction that the West should give no military help to South Vietnam against the Communists. If that is still his view, it is hard to see how his expression of sympathy for the Vietnamese can much affect the present situation. The U.S. will always welcome additional French support for the independent non-Communist forces of Southeast Asia, and we have been hoping for stronger French participation in the support of the Government of Laos, where the current policy of our two countries is in agreement.
- 2.

We have noted the French statement. As we understand the matter from Ambassador Alphand, this is merely a restatement of a view General De Gaulle has held for a long time. He apparently believes in neutralizing Vietnam, and not in giving help at present to those who would resist Communism there. We of course have a different view; we do not see how there can be independence and freedom for any part of Vietnam if those who are ready to resist the Communists are not supported.

So we have disagreed with the French over Vietnam. Fortunately in Laos we have an agreed policy; there is much room there for increased French activities and for increased French support of that hard-pressed government.

3. We have noted the French statement, but we do not know just what it means. If it means that France is now ready to share in the work of resisting Communist aggression in Vietnam, we can only applaud this change in French policy. Certainly, if the people of South Vietnam want such French help, it will be welcome to us too. But if the statement means that France does not believe in helping those who resist Communism, we can only say that we continue to disagree. And if the statement means that the Communist character of the regime in Hanoi and its aggressive support of subversion in South Vietnam are not matters of central importance, we simply do not understand it.
4. As we understand this statement, it is simply a general expression of good will from a country which has no present responsibility in the area and no intention of making any commitment of military or economic resources to the defense of South Vietnam against Communist subversion supported from the North. Expressions of good will are always welcome.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret; Eyes Only. Sent to Clifton and Salinger for the President. A note on the source text indicates that Salinger delivered it to the President.

² The President was scheduled to be interviewed by Walter Cronkite of CBS News on September 2; see [Document 50](#).

³ September 2.

⁴ See [footnote 7](#), [Document 26](#).

⁵ For documentation on the Taylor Mission to Vietnam, October 15-November 3, 1961, see [vol. I, pp. 380](#)  ff.

⁶ See [footnote 3, Document 29](#).

44. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 2, 1963, 10 p.m.

403. Eyes only for the Secretary. CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Adm Felt. Herewith report on meeting with Nhu from 4 to 6 p.m. Monday: also present: *[1 line not declassified]*.

1. Nhu will resign, leave the government service for good and move to Dalat after he has lifted martial law, which he would prefer to do after certain U.S. agents who he says are still promoting a coup d'etat against family have left. "Everybody knows who they are", he said. He would also appreciate American radio in Vietnam stopping its attack on GVN and he suggested as a matter of national pride that Americans coming to Vietnam be required to have Vietnamese visas. His resignation would be announced as a sign of the success of the program against the Viet Cong and it would be put out that things were going so well that he no longer needed to stay in the government.

- 2.

Madame Nhu to leave September 17 for the Interparliamentary Union meeting in Yugoslavia, for a trip in Italy and possibly a trip to the U.S. where she has been invited to come as a guest of what he called the "Overseas Club" which I suspect is the Overseas Press Club of New York.

[Numbered paragraph 3 (1 line) not declassified]

4. A number of measures involving Buddhist prisoners will be taken to ease these tensions.
5. Short of actual constitutional changes, Nhu is prepared, as an altogether new departure and as a public relations gesture, to consider broadening the membership of the Cabinet and to have a de facto Prime Minister. I pointed out to him that such a Prime Minister could absorb some of the criticism now going to the President and could easily be replaced.
6. In the context of this last approach, he suggested a change in the economic aid in terms of long range loans at low interest rates rather

than grants. He thought this would make it easier both for Americans and Vietnamese because we would not have responsibility for all the things that were done here which we did not like. He seemed to like the idea of relenting on austerity measures, such as dance halls for soldiers.

7. He said he could not leave the country because of his contacts with the Viet Cong who, he said, were extremely discouraged and ready to give up. He said that six months ago a Viet Cong colonel had offered to desert with three battalions, but Nhu had told him not to desert but to stay at the Laos frontier so he could secede at the right moment. He reported this to Embassy at the time. There was a Viet Cong general in Cambodia who wanted to see him. He said that not only was the Viet Cong discouraged, it felt it had been used and let down by North Vietnam. He predicted that pretty soon the only way to supply the Viet Cong would be by air. Supply by sea was already prohibited, supply by land would soon be virtually impossible. When supply was by air the planes would be shot down.
8. He told of the ChiCom offer to sell two U-40 planes, which, I understand, was reported by Nolting 60 days ago.
9. Polish Ambassador called on Nhu today to direct his attention to the statements of De Gaulle² and Ho Chi Minh³ and asked *Nhu* what the Polish Ambassador could report to Pham Van Dong, the North Vietnamese Prime Minister. Nhu said he replied: "Nothing. As regards De Gaulle, while he has a right to his opinion, those who do not take part in the fight have no right to interfere. Our loyalty to the Americans forbids us to consider either statement. The Americans are the only people on earth who dare to help South Vietnam. Therefore I have no comment."
10. Please let me know if you want me to go ahead on paragraphs 1, 2, 4 and 5.⁴

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Received at 10:59 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed by the Department of State to the White House, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and CIA. On another copy of this telegram a note indicates that the President read it. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables, Part I) According to an attached note by Mildred Asbjornson, September 2, General Carter of the CIA called the Secretary and "urged that no hasty action be taken on this message; that

it be discussed in depth at least at the EXCOM level. He said that McCone would be back tonight.”

² See [footnote 7, Document 26](#).

³ Apparent reference to an interview with Ho Chi Minh by Wilfred Burchett, published in the *New Times* of Moscow, May 29. When asked by Burchett to state what were the essential steps to ending the fighting in South Vietnam, Burchett quoted Ho Chi Minh as follows:

“Foreign intervention must cease. The forces and the weapons of the interventionists must be withdrawn. The 1954 Geneva Agreements must be respected and U.S. pledges not to violate these agreements by force or threat of force must also be respected. An end must be put to the barbarous attempt to uproot the population and force the people of South Viet-Nam into concentration camps. A cease-fire could presumably be arranged between the Diemist forces and those of the patriotic National-Liberation Front of South Viet-Nam. Conditions must be created in which the people of South Viet-Nam can freely elect a government of their own choice.”

⁴ Telegram 308 to Saigon, from Hilsman eyes only for Lodge, September 2—11:53 p.m., noted that instructions were being developed. “Meanwhile, President's radio statement of today (Deptel 306) should amply fill need for continued momentum in development of situation.” (Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET)

Telegram 306 to Saigon, September 2, transmitted an edited copy of the President's interview with Walter Cronkite. (*Ibid.*, POL S VIET/US) See [Document 50](#).

45. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) and the Secretary of State¹

Washington, September 2, 1963—11:28 a.m.

TELEPHONE CALL FROM SEC. McNAMARA TO SECRETARY RUSK

Sec. McNamara said he felt it very important that Gen. Harkins be put back in contact with Diem on military matters. McNamara said he had noticed in the messages a statement about dealing through intermediaries [*less than 1 line not declassified*]. The Sec said this was only for a day or so. McNamara said he thought we might wish to get Harkins back in contact with both Diem and Thuan. [*1 sentence (2 lines) not declassified*] McNamara said he would be inclined to favor dual channels. He said that Nolting's great contribution to establish this dialogue with Diem over a period of time had influenced and moved the latter as had Harkins with Thuan. The Sec thought that McNamara was basically right but suggested we wait for another 24 hours and see.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam, 8/29/63.

46. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, September 2, 1963.

[document number not declassified] Subject: Rufus Phillips conversations with General Kim on 31 August 1963.

1. Met General Kim about 5:30 PM, rather later than anticipated, and asked him what the situation was. Kim said that Nhu clearly expected coup attempt, that Tung's special forces were on full alert, and that they were in a position to prevent any coup attempt from succeeding at this time. Planning would continue, he said, but on tightly compartmented basis for security reason.
2. I then asked Kim if he aware General Khiem had seen Harkins that morning and if he knew what had been discussed. Kim said he had not heard of meeting and was sure *Big Minh* had not been informed.
3. I then told Kim that General Khiem had told Harkins in effect that Generals could do nothing, all planning had ceased, and perhaps best solution would be for Nhu to become Prime Minister with support of the Generals in exchange for more authority for Army.²
4. Kim reacted strongly and, I believe, sincerely. Was vehement in saying that Khiem had not spoken for the rest of Generals, admitted that activity had been curtailed because of apparent security leaks, but insisted that under no circumstances would Nhu be acceptable to them. Further, he did not know why Khiem had made these statements, but believed it probable that they were deliberate effort to mislead Harkins. Admitted possibility also that Khiem had decided to turn against coup group, or might be attempting to play lone hand.
5. Kim then said that would check immediately with Big Minh, and that he would seek to bring Minh to meeting that evening with Col Conein (for whom he specifically asked) and myself. This he wanted to do if possible (although General Minh might object for security reasons) to confirm Khiem was not speaking for Minh.
6. I agreed to meeting, but pointed out that Americans now seemed convinced as result of Khiem's statements that Generals lacked will to effect coup, and that it might be necessary for the Americans to continue supporting administration as presently constituted. Best way of saving situation, I said seemed to be for Minh to speak frankly to

Harkins. Kim replied he believed Minh would want to speak to Ambassador, if to anyone.

7. I told him I doubted if this possible but would investigate and, in any case, would meet him at 8 o'clock that evening. We broke up meeting after this discussion.
8. At Ambassador's residence I discussed situation briefly with Mr. Dunn, who advised me that proposed meeting with Ambassador was not desirable. After picking up Col Conein I returned to agreed meeting place. There I was again met by Kim, who asked that Col Conein stand guard while he talked to me.
9. Kim said that he had reported to Minh, who had said, in substance:
 - a. Khiem had not yet informed him of meeting with Harkins.
 - b. He had definite information that Nhu was aware Generals actively planning coup.
 - c. Had received information that Americans other than Conein and [*less than 1 line not declassified*] had contacted lower-ranking Vietnamese officers, urging them to effect coup. In this connection he mentioned that a Col Cuong (*sic*) had evidently been so contacted.
 - d. Vietnamese Special Forces had been placed on alert as result of Nhu's knowledge of Generals' intentions, and it was therefore impossible to do anything at this moment, without courting almost certain failure.
 - e. This did not mean planning was discontinued, or that he was not determined to go ahead and overthrow government. Under no circumstances would Nhu be acceptable.
 - f. He was sorry if Americans believed that Generals lacked the will. They did not, but at moment they lacked the means.
 - g. Americans should understand they had given so much to Nhu in the past that it was impossible to organize counter-action in few days. Further, so far as most Vietnamese officers were aware, US still supported present government. Words had been said against it, but there were no overt actions to back up the words. As result, whole operation against the government rested upon his word and that of a few others, which was not enough for immediate action by these officers.
 - h. Finally, he said, he understood why it was not feasible to talk to Ambassador, and that he did not wish to speak to General Harkins at this time.
10. After thus expressing Minh's views, Kim commented he agreed with Minh's assessment of situation and fully shared his views. Said that as friend he wanted me to know he was irrevocably committed against Nhus. Further, was confident that if US indicated firm disapproval of

Nhus they would be overthrown, but that this would take time, given their present preponderance of power. Americans, like Vietnamese, must be patient and persevering, and most important things they could do at this time would be:

- a. Clamp on tight security to protect Vietnamese who opposed Nhus, and;
- b. Indicate by actions, as well as words, that they (Americans) do not support Nhus or their creatures.

11. Lastly, Kim said he and Minh intended to thoroughly investigate Khiem's reliability.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. The source text is a copy sent by the CIA to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 1:01 p.m.

² See [Document 33](#).

47. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, September 2, 1963.

[document number not declassified] Following summarizes 30 August evening conversation CAS officer with [1 line not declassified]. CAS officer purpose was elicit further on [less than 1 line not declassified] statement last week quoting Polish Commissioner Maneli that Ambassador Lalouette had been acting as channel between Ngo Dinh Nhu and Pham Van Dong.

1. [less than 1 line not declassified] surprised that this news to U.S. Govt. They had reported months ago [less than 1 line not declassified] that Nhu policy was one of ultimate neutralization and unification of Vietnam. It was "open secret" Saigon diplomatic circles Nhu in touch with North. French policy over past year or more obviously that of encouraging rapprochement between two halves of country and use of French channels (not Lalouette personally) was foregone conclusion.
2. [less than 1 line not declassified] had no hard inter to back this up but repeated earlier statement that Maneli several times in past few months has asked him tell Nhu that Polish Commissioner also available for messages to Dong. Maneli asked [less than 1 line not declassified] also convey this word to Nhu. Both [less than 1 line not declassified] declined serve as intermediary to Nhu.
3. [less than 1 line not declassified] spelled out at some length his irritation with Americans for relying on "two-bit agents" and ignoring seasoned observers such as self who in position learn great deal. He then cited Nhu press interview circa 8 May in which Nhu said he looking forward to reduction American aid² as instance handwriting on wall which not appreciated by Americans. Reiterated earlier statements that Nhu basically anti-American.
4. Both [less than 1 line not declassified] said worst thing now would be for U.S. Govt to take precipitous action as was case in Laos with Phoumi. [less than 1 line not declassified] then offered their services to negotiate with Nhu. Both said *Nhu* wants negotiate. Both convinced Madame Nhu ready leave Vietnam as first step to save [garble] face. Apparently both recently in contact with Nhu and Nhu apparently volunteered that his wife would like take trip to CONUS right now. [less than 1 line not declassified] especially seemed anxious have DCM

Trueheart contact him, perhaps with some specific message he wants convey, but neither *[less than 1 line not declassified]* willing take initiative for such meeting or volunteer views. They waiting be asked.

5. *[less than 1 line not declassified]* then said he reliably informed that Nhu in meeting with Generals "the other night" told them he aware some of them thinking of fast action because they fear country lost without American aid. Nhu then told them not worry, other resources would be available if aid cut, and if worse came to worse he, as Generals aware, had contacts with Northern brothers and could get breathing spell by having North direct Southern guerrillas ease off operations while negotiating more permanent settlement.
6. *[less than 1 line not declassified]* said he fears U.S. Govt may be thinking of having Vietnamese troops march into Saigon. This unthinkable as consequent slaughter would have worse repercussions than Bay of Pigs. Both *[less than 1 line not declassified]* said they cabling home their assessment along these lines and again asked Trueheart take initiative to go see *[less than 1 line not declassified]*.
7. Above passed Embassy 31 August. Pouching full report.²

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy sent by the CIA to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were sent also to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 1:02 p.m.

² See [vol. III, p. 294, footnote 2](#) .

² Not found.

48. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, September 2, 1963.

[document number not declassified] 1. Following info acquired 1 Sept from American observer from sensitive source who reports unilaterally (B) who attended meeting on informal meeting with general officers called by Counsellor Nhu at ARVN HQS, 30 August 1963, 1530 to 1730 hours. All available Generals asked attend. Fifteen attended as follows: Generals Don, Duong Van Minh, Tran Van Minh, Tran Thiem Khiem, Le Van Nghiem, Le Van Kim, Pham Xuan Chieu, Tran Tu Oai, Nguyen Khanh, Nguyen Khanh, Nguyen Van La, Tran Ngoc Tam, Nguyen Giac Ngo, Van Thanh Cao, Mai Huu Xuan, Huyn Van Cao.

2. Replying to General Don question what ARVN position to be henceforth, Nhu said general situation will be more difficult. Buddhist and student trouble over, but those behind these groups do not think issues settled and will continue working together to overthrow government by any available means. ARVN role always is to support government.

3. General Duong Van Minh asked how to answer Americans who ask what we think of present situation. Nhu replied either state no comment or say you do not have enough information to comment.

4. Nhu then dominated informal conversation making following points:

- a. In discussion difficulties of working with U.S. Govt., cited CIA as group that would like to see him personally "out of way." Local CIA personnel do their utmost to alienate people from supporting government.
- b. There has been mobilization of international press against GVN, caused primarily by American press. Many local American officials covertly encourage American newsmen to report contrary to best interests of GVN.
- c. There now exists a mobilization aimed at overthrow of GVN supported by secret elements of U.S. Govt. This situation has intensified shortly after Test Ban Agreement with Russians.²

- d. Referring to Highlanders and people along Cambodian border, certain elements desire cause GVN more trouble and thus will intensify efforts involving these groups. Cambodia severed relations with GVN only because a foreign element insisted so that anti-GVN groups can exploit the people..
- e. American Defense Department is for Strategic Hamlet Program even though certain American officials have spoken out against it.
- f. Ambassador Lodge told me both Vietnam and U.S. Govt. are deeply committed to fighting Communism, and that therefore it is necessary that Vietnamese people be very friendly with U.S. Lodge could not understand why there is no close relationship between American and Vietnamese people.
- g. I know without American aid we cannot exist. USG is only country willing support our country without any strings attached. There are U.S. Govt. personnel in Vietnam not working conscientiously for welfare of Vietnamese people. This caused by CIA personnel and certain so-called professional political affairs officers. Ambassador Lodge now getting better picture of situation; we can manage him-he will fully agree with our concepts and actions.

5. Source Comments: Everyone present listened carefully. A number of them seemed accept Nhu comments as when he said U.S. Govt. will shortly announce tacit agreement in connection with GVN policies and actions. Source says he himself fully supports GVN but noted battles can be won but war cannot be won without full support of people. Majority of Generals seem to feel U.S. Govt. must take strong stand with Diem to achieve reform measures which constantly though covertly discussed among people. That in turn will assure popular support GVN wants of people.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy sent by the CIA to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and *Hilsman*. Copies were also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 1:02 p.m.

² The Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapons Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under the Water, signed at Moscow on August 5, 1963. (14 UST 1313)

49. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, September 2, 1963.

[document number not declassified] Damage assessment report.

1. First, we would like to state our belief that events of last week and their denouement as of this time do not represent decisive victory for Nhu and GVN and that they are not as result of these events out of woods. So far we would call contest draw. Gen. Kim's contact with Rufus Phillips² indicates operation has been contained not destroyed and that GVN still has good reason to fear and take into account activities on part of U.S. and of Generals.
2. We assume that Diem and Nhus are fully aware that USG encouraged Generals to attempt coup and that CAS was instrumentality of this encouragement. We estimate that they know good portion, possibly most of substantial details of our approaches. Our impression is that GVN realizes, however, that it is still in profound difficulty with military leaders, good portion of population, and with U.S. GVN must be assessing fact of U.S. willingness to back alternative leadership and to go to some lengths to encourage and support alternatives. Next moves on part of GVN and U.S. Govt will be to reach readjustment and re-accommodation and GVN must realize that it will have to give reasonable satisfaction to USG to continue major programs even if modified in form and practice.
3. There is even possibility that all major programs can go forward as in past although we expect some curtailment on those matters relating to political power centers.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy sent by the CIA to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Copies were also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. Received at the Department of State at 7:24 p.m.

² See [Document 46](#).

50. Interview With the President¹

Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, September 2, 1963.

[Here follows discussion of unrelated subjects.]

MR. CRONKITE: Mr. President, the only hot war we've got running at the moment is of course the one in Viet-Nam, and we have our difficulties there, quite obviously.

THE PRESIDENT. I don't think that unless a greater effort is made by the Government to win popular support that the war can be won out there. In the final analysis, it is their war. They are the ones who have to win it or lose it. We can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it, the people of Viet-Nam, against the Communists.

We are prepared to continue to assist them, but I don't think that the war can be won unless the people support the effort and, in my opinion, in the last 2 months, the government has gotten out of touch with the people.

The repressions against the Buddhists, we felt, were very unwise. Now all we can do is to make it very clear that we don't think this is the way to win. It is my hope that this will become increasingly obvious to the government, that they will take steps to try to bring back popular support for this very essential struggle.

MR. CRONKITE. Do you think this government still has time to regain the support of the people?

THE PRESIDENT. I do. With changes in policy and perhaps with personnel I think it can. If it doesn't make those changes, I would think that the chances of winning it would not be very good.

MR. CRONKITE. Hasn't every indication from Saigon been that President Diem has no intention of changing his pattern?

THE PRESIDENT. If he does not change it, of course, that is his decision. He has been there 10 years and, as I say, he has carried this burden when he has been counted out on a number of occasions.

Our best judgment is that he can't be successful on this basis. We hope that he comes to see that, but in the final analysis it is the people and the government itself who have to win or lose this struggle. All we can do is help, and we are making it very clear, but I don't agree with those who say we should withdraw. That would be a great mistake. I know people don't like Americans to be engaged in this kind of an effort. Forty-seven Americans have been killed in combat with the enemy, but this is a very important struggle even though it is far away.

We took all this—made this effort to defend Europe. Now Europe is quite secure. We also have to participate—we may not like it—in the defense of Asia.

MR. CRONKITE. Mr. President, have you made an assessment as to what President De Gaulle was up to in his statement on Viet-Nam last week?²

THE PRESIDENT. No. I guess it was an expression of his general view, but he doesn't have any forces there or any program of economic assistance, so that while these expressions are welcome, the burden is carried, as it usually is, by the United States and the people there. But I think anything General de Gaulle says should be listened to, and we listened.

What, of course, makes Americans somewhat impatient is that after carrying this load for 18 years, we are glad to get counsel, but we would like a little more assistance, real assistance. But we are going to meet our responsibility anyway.

It doesn't do us any good to say, "Well, why don't we all just go home and leave the world to those who are our enemies."

General De Gaulle is not our enemy. He is our friend and candid friend—and, there, sometimes difficulty—but he is not the object of our hostility.

MR. CRONKITE. Mr. President, the sending of Henry Cabot Lodge, who after all has been a political enemy of yours over the years at one point or another in your career, and his—sending him out to Saigon might raise some speculation that perhaps you are trying to keep this from being a political issue in 1964.

THE PRESIDENT. No. Ambassador Lodge wanted to go out to Saigon. If he were as careful as some politicians are, of course, he would not have wanted to go there. He would have maybe liked to have some safe job.

But he is energetic and he has strong feelings about the United States and, surprisingly as it seems, he put this ahead of his political career. Sometimes politicians do those things, Walter.

MR. CRONKITE. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT. And we are fortunate to have him.

MR. CRONKITE. Thank you, sir.

¹ Source: Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John E Kennedy, 1963, pp. 650-653. This interview was videotaped at Hyannis Port on the morning of September 2 and broadcast that evening on the CBS television network.

² See [footnote 7, Document 26](#).

51. Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President¹

Washington, September 2, 1963.

SUBJECT

Draft telegram to Lodge

1. The attached draft telegram to Lodge is a joint product of Hilsman, Forrestal, and myself. We have deliberately drafted it quite concretely and firmly in order to give a clear target for comment and suggestion by those to whom it is being circulated. By early evening I should have from Forrestal reactions of Harriman, McNamara, Rusk, and Taylor, and I will call you then.
2. The urgency of this message is only in the desire which McNamara and I feel particularly to get dialogue with Diem started. If you prefer to review this instruction in presence of your principal advisers, we only lose one day by waiting until tomorrow. Carter of CIA has strongly recommended this delay, and Dean Rusk inclines to agree.²
3. You may also wish to know before meeting with the Vice President that he has been very skeptical of last week's line of action and would probably incline to a line substantially softer than this message.
4. Pierre's first report of your press conference comments³ sounds perfect to us, and we believe that a message much weaker than the attached draft would be quite inconsistent with what you have said.

McG. B.

[Attachment]

Draft Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam⁴

Washington, September 2, 1963.

For Ambassador Lodge. Re your 403.

1. Results your talk with Nhu promising on surface but we fear stalling tactics especially in light of [*document number not declassified*].⁵ Thus Nhu [in?] Dalat could still be power behind throne; Mme. Nhu's tour could be plus for her local prestige unless she stays away a long time;

dealings with Buddhists depend on concrete action not expression of intent; broadening of Cabinet may or may not be real. In short, everything depends on evident cut in personal authority of Nhu.

2. In this situation feeling here is that it is essential that central negotiations should be conducted directly with Diem and that you should proceed to a first meeting as soon as possible. Bargain with Nhu would only confirm his ascendancy.
3. You should react strongly against any bargain on removal of U.S. agents or stopping of American radio attack on GVN. We are not offending party in this case and must not be put on defensive. This does not preclude later adjustments if we get a solid bargain.
4. You will have President's broadcast comment separately.⁶ You should emphasize to Diem that President has carefully understated degree of his concern in order to make needed improvements easier.
5. Subject to these specific comments, the following is guidance for your first conversation with Diem.
 - (a)

General Posture:

We will maintain publicly and privately tension of U.S. discontent with repression which has eroded effort toward common goal of winning war until there are concrete results in GVN policies and posture. U.S. not trying to overthrow government, but engaged in candid and critical talks to improve it. Purpose of general posture is to give you leverage with GVN; avoid false impression U.S. tried something and now backing off; and to avoid seeming to acquiesce in repression, which would put U.S. on wrong side fence with majority of people inside Vietnam and the world.

(b)

First Meeting with Diem:

You should make points Deptel 294⁷ re common interests in defeating Viet Cong; difficulty in continuing support in face daily juxtaposition U.S. casualties in [and] aid with repressive measures; and common problem, under time urgency of working out set of GVN policies and actions that will make continued support possible.

Specifics in addition to 1, 2, 4 and 5 of your 403; release of remaining students and bonzes including satisfactory guarantees safety of three

bonzes now in U.S. embassy; removal of press censorship; restoration of damaged pagodas by the GVN; repeal of decree 10; and honest negotiation between GVN and through Buddhist leadership on outstanding issues.

6. If any progress made on foregoing your continuing dialogue with Diem should include pressing further measures to widen support at home and abroad such as
 - (a) revitalization of GVN, possible Thuan as PM, generals in posts of Defense and Interior.
 - (b) improvement of relations with Cambodia covering border incidents, Mekong rights.
 - (c) redefinition of role of U.S. advisers to give them broader scope.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret. A note on the source text indicates that the President read this memorandum and another note in Clifton's hand states: "Bundy ready to talk on the phone." No record of the President's conversation with Bundy has been found.

² Rusk expressed his agreement with Carter in a telephone conversation with Hilsman, September 2—1:12 p.m., as follows:

"The Sec. said that Pat Carter had urged no hasty action on reply to 403 from Saigon. Hilsman said he had gotten the word also and had passed it along to Bundy. Bundy did not favor hasty action. They were in the process of working on a draft to pouch to the Pres. The idea was to get the draft to the Pres., the Sec, the other Principals and then see where we go from there. The Sec. said to remove some of our people would be very dangerous." (Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations) Telegram 403 is [Document 44](#).

³ Not found.

⁴ For text of this telegram as sent, see [Document 56](#).

⁵ Document 46.

⁶ Reference is to telegram 319 to Saigon, in which the text of the President's interview of September 2 was transmitted with the instruction that it should not be released to the press there. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET)

⁷ Document 39.

52. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)¹

Washington, September 3, 1963—10:45 a.m.

Harriman asked Hilsman if he wanted to see him.

Hilsman said yes. After a cable² was developed and approved by the Secretary, the President decided to wait. His reason was to let them stew in Saigon.

Harriman asked Hilsman what he thought of his statement.³

Hilsman said "great."

Harriman said he thought the radio comment was rather bad because it said we promised aid to Ziem but he guessed that was all right. Harriman said: So they decided not to send it.

Hilsman said they decided to postpone sending it. Hilsman said he would send a copy to Harriman to look at and Harriman could decide whether he wanted to talk to him.

Harriman asked if Fritz went to the Pentagon.

Hilsman said he went last week to talk to McNamara with our approval.⁴

Harriman said he hasn't been since?

Hilsman said he has been behaving well the last couple of days. He is beginning to disengage.

Harriman told Hilsman he made a mistake to refer to him at the White House.

Hilsman said he did this because he wanted to make sure he got his full voice.

Harriman said he didn't think it was Hilsman's job to call on him to speak. Harriman said Hilsman did this because he thought he was going to support him.

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Dolores R Perruso of Harriman's staff.

² Attached to the memorandum, [Document 51](#).

³ See [footnote 5](#), [Document 207](#).

⁴ No record of this discussion has been found.

53. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) to the President¹

Washington, undated.

CM-882-63

SUBJECT

Summary of Military Operations in Vietnam

Final reports of military operations in Vietnam for the month of August indicate favorable trends in all military activities, despite Saigon's preoccupation with the unstable political situation. During the month of August, the Government forces conducted 166 large operations (battalion equivalents or more), a figure which compares most favorably with the 168 large operations conducted in July-the month which set new highs, as the execution phase of the National Military Campaign was begun. Although the number of regular combat battalions committed was somewhat reduced, ranger, civil guard, and self defense corps units were used extensively to maintain the operational tempo. Small unit actions show an increase from 10,240 in July to 15,480 in August. General Harkins attributes much of this apparent increase to better reporting procedures.

Of particular interest are increases in the last week (28 August-4 September). There were 56 large and 3211 small unit government operations in progress, as compared to 49 large and 3146 small unit operations for the previous week. This increase in tempo is somewhat offset by a reduction in friendly casualties to 308, which is the lowest figure for this category for July and August.

Viet Cong activity for the past week was at the highest level since July with a total of 391 incidents of all types. This increase in activity was not without cost, for Viet Cong casualties also rose to 567, continuing a three-week rising trend. The Viet Cong can be expected to continue a high level of activity in an attempt to create as much confusion and lack of faith in the government as possible.

Finally, as of 2 September, progress continues with the strategic hamlet program. The latest Government of Vietnam figures indicate that 8,227 of

the 10,592 planned hamlets had been completed. 76 per cent, or 9,563,370 of the rural population, are now in these hamlets.

Maxwell D. Tavl²

¹ Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Vietnam, chap. XXIII. Secret. The source text bears a notation that Taylor handcarried the memorandum to the President. Taylor among others saw the President on September 3 for the noon meeting on Vietnam; see [Document 54](#). The signed original of this memorandum is in the Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Vietnam, Security, 1963.

² Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

54. Memorandum of Conference With the President¹

Washington, September 3, 1963, noon.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

OTHERS PRESENT

Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, Secretary Dillon, Attorney General, General Carter, Director McCone, General Taylor, General Krulak, Under Secretary Harriman, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric, Ambassador Nolting, Mr. Hilsman, Mr. Colby, General Clifton, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Bromley Smith

The President asked what the French are doing toward assisting the Vietnamese. He was handed a paper on French economic and military programs in Vietnam.² He commented that the French were doing practically nothing and their program had been minimal in the last ten years.

Mr. Hilsman added that the French were doing very little in Laos. Mr. Forrestal said their program there involved approximately \$9 million.

The President commented that the French were trying to get for Vietnam what had been done in Laos, i.e. neutralization. He pointed out that neutralization was not working in Laos and he wondered why Walter Lippmann had suggested that the Laotian case provided an illustration of what should be done in Vietnam. As to whether the French would protest the recent statement³ he had made about De Gaulle's comment⁴ on Vietnam, the President said he doubted Ambassador Alphand had the guts to protest.

Secretary Rusk suggested that the President look at the draft instructions to Ambassador Lodge (copy attached).⁵

The President requested any information on a report⁶ concerning the defection of three Viet Cong battalions. Ambassador Nolting said that this report involved units in Laos, not Vietnam. Mr. McCone cast doubt on the entire report which had been repeated by Nhu in his statement to our officials.⁷

The President asked whether sending Nhu to Dalat would mean an improvement in the situation in Saigon. Several members agreed that it

would be an improvement.

Secretary McNamara said that the resignation of Nhu would be helpful for U.S. public opinion and world opinion. If Nhu were physically absent from Saigon, this would also be an asset.

In the light of these comments, the President asked that the first paragraph of the Lodge instructions be rewritten. He did not think we should be so negative as the draft.⁸ Mr. Hilsman responded that the instructions represented our opening bid to Diem. He expected that they would end up somewhere in the middle.

The President felt that there might be some substance to the proposals Nhu made to Ambassador Lodge. He did not think we ought to discourage the travel abroad of Madame Nhu, but he did not want her to come to the U.S., and above all, did not want her to make a speech in Washington. Mr. McCone added that he thought a trip by Madame Nhu was a good idea. He believed we could handle the press in such a way that the trip would not increase Madame Nhu's prestige.

The President asked whether we should negotiate with Nhu or Diem, but expressed his view that we should negotiate with Diem, as the instructions indicated. Mr. Harriman agreed that negotiations should be conducted directly with Diem.

The President suggested that paragraph 2 be revised to indicate that General Harkins should resume frequent meetings with Minister of Defense Thuan and Diem on military matters as soon as Ambassador Lodge had met with Diem.

Paragraph 3 dealing with how to react to any suggestions to remove individual Americans or to stop what are alleged to be American radio attacks on the Diem regime was deleted after Secretary McNamara and Director McCone expressed their doubt as to whether Ambassador Lodge should discuss these matters at all. It was decided that the paragraph was not necessary in the light of the President's public statement.

Secretary Rusk pointed out that Diem may insist that certain U.S. officials be removed from Vietnam. He said that if the Vietnamese know what we know they would undoubtedly want certain officials to leave. He suggested that we leave the personnel question open but keep in the question of U.S. radio attacks. Ambassador Nolting thought that Nhu's

complaints about U.S. radio attacks referred not to the Voice of America but to certain armed forces radio programs heard in the area.

At the President's suggestion, paragraph 4 is to be rewritten to make clear that the President's broadcast was an effort to express his views on the situation in Vietnam and was not a personal attack on Diem. Ambassador Nolting commented that the President's words would not be provocative to Diem because he would understand why the President was required to comment on the Vietnamese situation. It was agreed that the entire CBS transcript, part of which was not broadcast, would be sent to Ambassador Lodge.

Paragraph 5 was revised in ways which are apparent in comparing the draft with the final text (attached).⁹

The President commented that Halberstam, the New York Times reporter in Saigon, was not an accurate reporter. He noted that the Bonzes went to our Ambassador in search of protection. Hence, the Buddhists were not anti-U.S.¹⁰

A draft of an additional paragraph was circulated. It involved military contacts with the Vietnamese generals. It provoked a prolonged discussion which resulted in its being deleted.

Mr. Hilsman pointed out that we had already had two contacts with Vietnamese generals. One would lead to a further discussion, and the other was a rejection, in effect, of further contact. Secretary Rusk said these contacts indicated there was less support than we had thought there would be.

Secretary McNamara asked why we should try to unscramble the confused situation among the generals in Vietnam. He thought we ought to keep Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins out of touch with the generals.

The President decided that we should wait for the generals to contact us. Meanwhile, we assume that they are not acting and that we are going down a diplomatic route. When they come to us we will talk to them. We should avoid letting the generals think that the U.S. had backed off.

As the meeting ended, Secretary McNamara and General Taylor agreed that no action need be taken in connection with current instructions to our military forces. Fleet movements would continue in view of the fact that such action created no problems for us. Ships on station would remain in place. Proposed redeployment of aircraft would be stood down, however.

Bromley Smith^{[11](#)}

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. The meeting was held at the White House. Also published in Declassified Documents, 1982, 649A. A memorandum for the record of this meeting by Krulak is in the National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Vietnam, chap. XXIII.

² Not found.

³ Document 50.

⁴ See [footnote 7](#), [Document 26](#).

⁵ Not attached to the source text. A draft telegram was attached to Krulak's memorandum for the record. With the exception of the last two paragraphs (see [footnote 10](#) below) the draft cable attached to [Document 51](#) was almost identical to the draft under discussion at this meeting. For the cable as sent, see [Document 56](#).

⁶ Not found.

⁷ See [Document 44](#).

⁸ In Krulak's record, the President's remarks are recorded in more detail. It reads as follows:

"The President stated, with respect to paragraph 1, that it is too negative; that it should be rewritten to exhibit that visible removal of the Nhus from the Saigon scene is some improvement, and to make sure that there is a requirement for some actual substance in the reduction of Nhu's power."

⁹ In Krulak's record, he describes these revisions as follows:

"5. Respecting paragraph 5a of the attached draft, the President did not desire to use the expression 'keep up tension' and directed that it be

replaced by the phrase 'we will continue to assert, publicly and privately, U.S. discontent'. In connection with paragraph 5b, the President was desirous of ensuring that the second phrase read 'difficulty in continuing support of American people'."

¹⁰ Krulak's record of the rest of the discussion at the meeting reads as follows:

"6. Following further discussion and minor editorial alteration of the draft, Mr. Hilsman proposed the addition of two paragraphs, shown on the attached as paragraphs 6 and 7. The President decided to omit paragraph 7 and have paragraph 6 sent as a separate message in light of its greater sensitivity. He stated that its thrust should be in terms of saying that the generals should be in contact with us, rather than we with them, in the event that they desire action; that, on the basis that the generals are not acting, we are now making a diplomatic effort. He was anxious to make it plain that it was the generals and not we who backed off."

Paragraphs 6 and 7 referred to by Krulak were not part of the draft attached to [Document 51](#). They read as follows:

"6. It is possible that Nhu's response to present confrontation between U.S. and GVN might be violent and it seems to us essential that we open other possibilities. In view of this and [*document number not declassified —Document 46*], you authorized to explain to 'Big' Minh either directly or via Kim that we are pressing Diem to change policies, but realize there is little real hope of achieving this.

"7. Your authority to suspend U.S. aid at any time remains in force."
(Draft telegram attached to memorandum for the record by Krulak)

¹¹ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

55. Memorandum of Telephone Conversations Between the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs (Manning) and the President¹

Washington, September 3, 1963, 4:35 and 4:45 p.m.

TELEPHONE CALL TO THE PRESIDENT, 4:35 pm

The President asked who had done the AP story² and who had talked with him. Mr. Manning said it was Hightower, and that he felt it was a case of pure and careful deduction. The President said he would not want VOA carrying the story. Mr M said he had spoken with Ed³ yesterday and it had been agreed we would confine our selves strictly to the President's comments. Mr M said he did not think anyone had been talking out of turn; he himself had been the only one, he believed to talk with Hightower since the President's statement and he remembered what he had told him. Mr M said that we had made a strong statement last week and when we pointed the finger, any good correspondent would be bound to draw some conclusions and get the idea that Nhu is the one we do not like. The President said we do not think we can get him completely out of the picture. Mr M said there was a problem in saying that too. Mr. M said he had made clear to Hightower that we could not tell the Vietnamese Government what to do and who to choose. Mr M said he felt Hightower had a good grip on things.

TELEPHONE CALL FROM THE PRESIDENT, 4:45 pm

The President called back re the mention in the above discussed article of cutting aid. Mr M said he had tried to make clear that we have not made any decisions of that sort and could not without making the decision to withdraw which had not been made. The President said he thought it would be good if we could turn these stories off for a few days, and not have people going on TV. Mr M mentioned that Mr Hilsman had been turning down press calls and TV requests. The President agreed that was wise.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries, Series—Vietnam. Confidential. Drafted by Manning.

² Not further identified.

³ Edward R. Murrow.

56. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 3, 1963—9:35 p.m.

317. Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge. Re your 403.² Results your talk with Nhu promising on surface but we fear stalling tactics especially in light of [2 document numbers not declassified].³ Thus, Nhu in Dalat would be some improvement, but he could still be power behind throne; Madame Nhu's tour could be plus for her local prestige unless she stays away a long time and takes a vacation rather than a speech making world tour (we would emphatically oppose her speaking in the US); dealings with Buddhists depend on concrete action not expression of intent; broadening of cabinet may or may not be real. In short, everything depends on there being real substance to Nhu's various proposals and change in GVN policies and actions. If Nhu is sincere in his desire reach accommodation rather than merely stalling, his initial offer may be subject to negotiation upward if we maintain momentum. Accordingly, we should start negotiations with optimum position, expecting that GVN and we might meet somewhere in between.

In this situation feeling here is that it is essential that central negotiations should be conducted directly with Diem and that you should proceed to a first meeting as soon as in your judgment you think it desirable. Bargain with Nhu would only confirm his ascendancy. We should be inclined to press for earliest such meeting. (Harkins should resume his routine military contacts, and, following your talk with Diem, should resume frequent contacts with Thuan and Diem on military matters to get on with war.)

You will have President's broadcast comments separately. You should emphasize to Diem that President has expressed his views because of his concern for the success of the war effort and his hope that the GVN will recognize the need for changes in their policy and improvements in their government.

Subject to these specific comments, the following is guidance for your first conversation with Diem.

- (a) *General Posture*: We will continue to assert publicly and privately US discontent with repression which has eroded effort toward common goal of winning war until there are concrete results in GVN policies and posture. US not trying to overthrow government, but engaged in candid and critical talks to improve it. Purpose of general posture is to give you leverage with GVN; avoid false public impression US tried something and now backing off; and to avoid seeming to acquiesce in repression, which would put US on wrong side fence with majority of people inside Viet-Nam and the world.
- (b) *First Meeting with Diem*: You should make points Deptel 294⁴ re common interests in defeating Viet Cong; difficulty for US Government in maintaining support of American people in face daily juxtaposition US casualties and aid with repressive measures; and common problem, under time urgency, of working out set of GVN policies and actions that will make continued support possible.

Additional specifics are: release of remaining students and bonzes, including satisfactory guarantees safety of three bonzes now in US Embassy; removal of press censorship; restoration of damaged pagodas by the GVN; repeal of Decree 10; and honest negotiation between GVN and true Buddhist leadership on outstanding issues. You may assure Diem that if he takes appropriate action, USG will do all in its power to improve opinion of GVN in the US.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared in draft by Rusk, Forrestal, McNamara, and Taylor. Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD exclusive for Felt. An earlier draft is attached to [Document 51](#). Regarding the preparation of this cable, see [Document 54](#).

² Document 44.

³ Documents 46 and [48](#).

⁴ Document 39.

57. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 3, 1963—9:36 p.m.

318. Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge. Further to Deptel 317,² if Generals indicate that they are concerned about your approach to Diem, you may explain to them present policy through channels you deem suitable along following lines:

Original initiative lay with Generals and US responded to their approach. Since Generals have indicated they are unwilling or unable to act now, US trying to improve situation by diplomatic means. If the Generals desire reopen discussion of plans for action by them, US should reserve its position and you should report to Department.³

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared in draft by Rusk and Forrestal.

² Document 56.

³ Lodge replied in telegram 413, September 4, eyes only for Rusk, as follows: "Would be surprised if generals indicated any concern, as they show very few signs of life, but your 318 most helpful in case we should hear from that [*them?*]." (Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET)

58. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 4, 1963 11:08 p.m.

412. CINCPAC for POLAD. Eyes only for Secretary. CINCPAC exclusive for Admiral Felt. Deptel 317.²

1. If I correctly understand instructions, they are based on a very different reading of the situation here and the possibilities than my own and my colleagues. Reftel states that "everything depends on there being real substance in Nhu's various proposals and change in GVN policies and actions." In fact, Nhu's proposals, insofar as they related to what he is offering us, have very little substance, and I did not mean to suggest in my 403³ that they did have, they are largely scenery. Nhu is certainly not contemplating a change in GVN policies and actions. On contrary, he feels in a stronger position than ever before domestically and he no doubt feels reassured from President's excellent TV conference that we are not planning to pull out, which has surely been his assumption right along.
2. Our leverage is therefore very slight, and the question whether Washington would like to see an agreement between US and GVN along lines of my 403, in an effort to clear the air and then get on with the war (and wait for appearance of individual or group with iron and will to take over government). If answer is in the affirmative, then I would propose to proceed as follows:
 - a. Believe it would be unwise to talk to Diem until we have reacted to Nhu's offer. Do not think this would give Nhu any greater ascendancy than he has already. Nhu's so-called retirement and Madame Nhu's departure can only be worked out directly through Nhu.
 - b. Meeting to be held with Nhu [*2 lines not declassified*]. Aim at this meeting would be to spell out details of Nhu's change of status; length of time of Madame Nhu's absence. I assume three months would have value to us in broadening of Cabinet membership; release of students and bonzes still in prison; and repair of pagodas. Am advised [*less than 1 line not declassified*] that repeal of Decree Law No. 10 is no longer relevant. However, it would no doubt have value in UN and I would try for this too. Release of bonzes in Embassy not yet requested. When it is asked for, we can stipulate

safety guarantee. Possibly best solution would be for GVN to agree Quang can leave country. As for negotiating outstanding issues with "true Buddhist leadership," this is out of the question if we mean pre-May 21 leadership.

- c. Once these matters are settled with Nhu, I would see Diem, as a gesture of ratification.
 - d. If I see Diem now with all of Nhu's proposals hanging fire, I will get nothing but a two-hour filibuster and a mouthful of generalities and run risk of losing whatever progress has been made.
 - e. President's broadcast is excellent in underscoring serious view we take of situation. I have already at great length dwelt on the importance of improving GVN posture and will do so again.
3. If something like this is not satisfactory and we must have a change in GVN policies and actions, then we must have leverage. Nothing better has occurred to me on this score than previous suggestion of arranging for House or House Committee to cut our aid for Vietnam. I could then demand concessions on ground they necessary to get Congressional action reversed.
4. Other devices may occur to Washington, but we must be clear as to our objectives. I regret that none of alternatives is inviting. Do not want to bother you with details, but the question of whether we will be satisfied with agreement on points in my 403 or whether we insist on far-reaching policy changes (which cannot be had with existing leverage) is so fundamental that I ask guidance.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Received at 11:10 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House, CIA, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

² Document 56.

³ Document 44.

59. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 4, 1963—8:48 p.m.

324. Eyes only Ambassador Lodge. Embtel 412.²

1. Re your paragraph 4, President's interview³ sets general objective of U.S. policy, i.e., to secure a victory in war against Viet Cong. It is in that context that he expressed our sense of need for change in GVN policies and perhaps in personnel so as to regain touch with people.
2. Re your paragraph 3, we recognize that you are entering into difficult negotiations and must be the first judge of what you can or cannot achieve in the light of the leverage which you have. Believe you will have clearer picture of what is possible after your first talks with Diem or Nhu and we will then be in better position evaluate results and decide whether we can provide you with more powerful negotiating tools.
3. You are best judge of whether it is wiser to talk to Nhu or Diem first on question of Nhu's offer to resign and we accept your advice on this point. However suggest you save other policy issues for talks with Diem. Believe it important to get both talks started as soon as you can.
4. Do not really believe we have different readings of the situation. Our previous exchanges of telegrams should give you idea of what we believe would be optimum outcome of your talks. Goal is that GVN have political support at home and abroad indispensable to winning war. In opening negotiations you should press for maximum steps in this direction, along lines generally agreed in our preceding exchanges. We do not believe we should set minimum terms at this stage, but should await further report on your negotiations.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIEI Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared by Rusk, Harriman, and Bundy. Repeated to CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Felt.

² *Supra*.

³ Document 50.

60. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 5, 1963, 3 p.m.

417. CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Admiral Felt. Eyes only for the Secretary. Your 324.²

1. Agree your paragraph 1 on great desirability of "change in GVN policies." There may be an off-chance I might in time get in a position to give them advice, some of which they would take. But this is clearly impossible in the present atmosphere.
2. Re your paragraph 2 as to "what I can or cannot achieve", the main leverage I have is the build-up given me by the President's personal letter³ which has inspired some hope in GVN that I will some day speak well of them to U.S. public. They, therefore, may be willing to do something to impel me to do so. I am using this leverage to the utmost as well as President's expressions of disapproval.
3. But I do not believe their word is good; Nhu's resignation surely would mean very little; Madame Nhu's departure is obviously intended to be a triumphant lecture tour; the broadening of the membership of the government will realistically change nothing; and the placating of the Buddhists, as far as GVN is concerned, is largely done. If these things have no usefulness in the U.S. as gestures, they are probably not worth doing. It would be better to keep them worried than to agree to some gestures which we regard as essentially meaningless but which would give them the feeling that they are forgiven.
4. Rather than go myself, I intend to get [*less than 1 line not declassified*] to tell Nhu that we are really not interested in his package; that is, his resignation, Madame Nhu's lecture tour, etc., and see if they can get something better. If they get something better, I can then go back.
5. If [*less than 1 line not declassified*] produce nothing substantial, I would then see Diem and request the departure of both Nhus, the broadening of the composition of the government, the placating of the Buddhists, etc. Believe this will be for the record only but, of course, will try.
6. As to "political support at home and abroad" in your paragraph 4, I do not believe the GVN really understands this at all. They are essentially a medieval, Oriental despotism of the classic family type,

who understand few, if any, of the arts of popular government. They cannot talk to the people; they cannot cultivate the press; they cannot delegate authority or inspire trust; they cannot comprehend the idea of government as the servant of the people. They are interested in physical security and survival against any threat whatsoever—Communist or non-Communist.

7. Of course, I will always keep trying, hoping this estimate may be wrong and that there may be changes of one kind or another.
8. We are also studying possibilities of selective cutbacks or controls on aid components. Separate telegram will follow on this.⁴

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Received at 5:05 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House, CIA, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

² *Supra*.

³ See [vol. III, p. 644, footnote 2](#) .

⁴ Not found.

In telegram 337 to Saigon, September 5—9:10 p.m., addressed to Lodge, Hilsman with clearances in substance from Rusk and Bundy, replied as follows:

“Approve your tactics, but reiterate our feeling here of importance seeing Diem as soon as possible in order to try to assess real situation and what can now be best done.” (Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET)

61. Draft Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) and the President¹

Washington, September 5, 1963—8:55 a.m.

The President: Hello, Roger. Who puts this stuff out in Washington? There's an article in The New York Times by Tad Schultz [*Szulc*], page 5, in which he says that officials say that Nhu is trying to blackmail us.² It's a big story on page 5 and there's more on page 1.

Mr. Hilsman: I've given strict orders to everyone in FE not to talk to the press. I don't know where he gets this stuff.

JFK: Call Manning and see if he might have said anything. If no one is telling Schulz this stuff then somebody ought to call the NY Times. If nobody there—you or Manning or Gov. Harriman—has said anything then no one with the authority could have said this.

Mr. Hilsman: I will look into it, sir.

JFK: We can't have people saying that US officials are saying these kinds of things. If somebody is, we've got to put a stop to it. If not, then nobody qualified to make such a statement could have given him this kind of information. Let's get Manning and Harriman and if not them, then call *The New York Times*. Has Gov. Harriman talked to anybody?

RH: Not to my knowledge, sir.

JFK: Well, check into it and call me back this morning.

RH: Well, sir, I have to testify before the Senate this morning.

JFK: On what? What will they be asking you about?

RH: About Laos and Viet-Nam and Korea.

JFK: Who specifically?

RH: Senator Lausche. Miraculously we're on very good terms and he has been most cooperative. I'll be testifying in executive session; nothing official and it will be just a background review of the situation.

JFK: What about Lodge talking to the French Ambassador?³

RH: Well I slapped his wrist in a cable about 4 days ago about the Halberstam article.⁴ He ought to watch the paper more closely down there.

JFK: Well, good. Now I want to have this *NY Times* article looked into this morning. I think it makes us look a little-

RH: If we find out that no one with authority in FE and no one-Manning nor Harriman spoke to the press, then we will put in a call to *The New York Times* and let them know that nobody with authority could possibly have made these statements.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam. This memorandum apparently was transcribed by a staff member in Hilsman's office.

² In this New York Times article entitled, "Washington Officials Accuse Nhu of Blackmail," September 5, Szulc stated that administration officials believed Nhu's attempts at political blackmail were bound to fail.

³ Telegram 410 from Saigon, September 4, reported on Lodge's conversation with Lalouette. Lalouette "reiterated that Nhu believed he could work out an arrangement with the VC whereby the guerilla war would be ended. I asked what would be the quid pro quo, and he said: the withdrawal of some US troops."

Lodge reported that what Lalouette "particularly stressed was his belief there is no alternative to the Diem regime and that we must work with them as partners to win the war." (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Country Series-Vietnam, State cables)

⁴ In White House telegram CAP 63474 to Saigon, September 1, Hilsman told Lodge that it appeared Halberstam in his August 30 article entitled, "U.S. Policy Clash With Diem Hinted," printed in The New York Times of August 31, "may have picked up some points from US sources."

Hilsman noted: "Possible that some US officials talking too much with press or other embassy staffs. Trust you are cautioning staff." (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State cables)

62. Editorial Note

On September 5, 1963, President Diem sent United Nations Secretary-General U Thant a letter responding to an appeal by U Thant on August 31. On behalf of Asian and African member states, U Thant expressed grave concern over the situation in the Republic of Vietnam. The Secretary-General added his own "personal appeal" to Diem "to find a solution to the questions which are so deeply affecting the population of your country." Diem's response denied that there was suppression of Buddhism in the Republic of Vietnam, charged that such an allegation was "an imperialist invention," and stated that the African and Asian members of the United Nations were "allowing themselves to be poisoned by an international conspiracy of the East or West against the Republic of Viet-Nam." Diem stated that Vietnam was upholding public order, freeing the Buddhist hierarchy of outside influence, and had already found a solution to the Buddhist question. U Thant's letter of August 31 is printed in *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents*, 1963, pages 869-870. Diem's letter of September 5 is *ibid.*, pages 871-872.

63. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 5, 1963—8:42 p.m.

335. Ambassador from Hilsman. My two-hour executive session today with Far East Subcommittee of Senate Foreign Relations Committee revealed far-reaching doubts regarding not only Diem-Nhu leadership but also advisability of continued US participation in Viet-Nam war. Subcommittee mood augurs heavy sledding in upcoming Senate aid debate as well as probable introduction of resolution condemning further US support for GVN; e.g. "It is the sense of the Senate that the American people are no longer willing to support a regime in South Viet-Nam that oppresses the people and religious sects. Continued support of such a regime is inconsistent with the basic precepts of American democracy."

Major themes of Senatorial concern today were: "disaster course" of Diem-Nhu leadership; dangers in Viet-Nam and elsewhere of US identification with repressive regime; press reports of Nhu contacts with Hanoi; failure of US to produce alternative to Diem-Nhu; absence of clear indications as to where we go from here.

Suggest that you make use, at your discretion, of this Congressional storm-warning in your approaches to GVN.²

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Secret; Priority. Drafted by James C. Thomson, Special Assistant, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs; cleared in draft with John R White, Legislative Officer, Bureau of Congressional Relations; and approved by Hilsman.

² In telegram 431 from Saigon, September 6, Lodge informed Hilsman of the use he made of telegram 335 to Saigon: "Your 335 came at the right moment and was most helpful. I read it to [*less than 1 line not declassified*] who were profoundly moved and are immediately seeking interview with Nhu and the Madame. They do not propose to bargain but simply to tell him that now he and his wife have no choice but to leave the country for six months. Will keep you posted. This will open

the way for my showdown conference with Diem." (*Ibid.*, POL 1 S VIET-US)

64. Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, September 5, 1963.

I received this private letter from the former Director of the Vietnamese Bureau of the Budget, who was perhaps the closest friend of the United States until he resigned from the Vietnamese government a couple of years ago. It seems to me that the views which he expresses, and which closely parallel those stated by former Foreign Minister Vu Van Mau to Chester Bowles,² are very sober judgments which are worth our close attention.

I am sending you two copies of the letter with the thought that you may wish to show one of them to the President.

W.A.H.

[Attachment]

Letter From Vu Van Thai to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman)³

Lome, Togo, August 24, 1963.

DEAR MR. UNDERSECRETARY: When we met two years ago you suggested kindly that I may send you a private message whenever I have something to say about the situation in my country: Vietnam. I am now taking advantage of this permission because while I am now in Africa, deeply involved in the development problems of this part of the world, I cannot refrain from being anguished by the late events in my own country.

Two years ago I told you that any political improvement must come from the people and that political change must be the responsibility of the Vietnamese themselves. I did not agree with those who claimed to be Vietnamese political leaders and were only expecting changes worked out by foreign influence.

Now I am pleading that the US does its utmost to prevent the further crushing of the Buddhist movement and the subsequent political protest which has developed out of general discontentment and of M. Diem and family's handling of the religious crisis.

I am advocating a strong stand from the US not only for the sake of those directly threatened by Diem's repression, but also for the sake of preserving the Southern part of Vietnam as a place where one day a true regime of freedom of thought could seed and develop.

Without a US clear cut condemnation of M. Diem's recent sacking of temples, it will be impossible for any future Vietnamese Government to be able to gain popular support while siding with the West. Yet our chance of survival depends from the conciliation of these two conditions.

M. Diem and his family must go now, even if there is no ready made alternative, even if the change involves important risks; those risks must be taken for M. Diem has become the worst alternative, the only one leading to fatal communist takeover.

Even those most attached to freedom like myself cannot accept the idea of the continuation of M. Diem's rule for the sake of preserving our country from falling into communist hands.

It is time now for the US to side with the people of Vietnam in its struggle to free itself from dictatorship. Time is now working for the communists, action has to be taken quickly. I am convinced that the Vietnamese people is ready to fight for Independence and Freedom, it will never fight for anti-communism as such.

This letter is not inspired by any political ambition, it is not motivated by any partisan consideration. I am now in International Service and intend to remain so. If I raise my voice now it is because as a simple Vietnamese I feel compelled to do so; the recent events in Vietnam is [are] as shocking as the crushing of the Hungarian revolt.

Sincerely yours,

Vu Van Thai⁴

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Confidential. Harriman also sent a copy of the attached letter to McNamara under cover of a similar memorandum. Harriman suggested to McNamara that the opinions in the letter represent "judgments which cannot be ignored." (Washington National Records center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 69 A 3131, Vietnam 091)

² As reported in telegram 911 from New Delhi, September 4. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET)

³ Vu Van Thai was currently a representative of the United Nations stationed in Togo. The source text bears a marginal note indicating that this letter was taken from the President's weekend reading file of September 6.

⁴ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

65. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the
Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs
(Hilsman) and the President¹

Washington, September 6, 1963—9:15 a.m.

SUBJECT
Viet-Nam

The President telephoned and asked what the news was.

Mr. Hilsman said we did not have a telegram in yet.

The President mentioned the newspaper stories attributed to one of our wonderful sources there. Mr. Hilsman said that we had gotten the ticker last night and had sent a blast to Saigon.² The President said this strips us kind of bare. Mr. Hilsman said this makes him so damned mad. He had warned them about talking. The President said you can't stop people from doing that. We have the same problem here.

The President said we now should have some sort of economic program—things we could do that would not have material effect immediately but which would give them the word. Mr. Hilsman said he had started looking into the various possibilities a week ago. In reply to the President's question, Mr. Hilsman said there was not too much. The President asked what about tying aid to U.S. purchases. Mr. Hilsman said this was an idea; that we tie some in anyway. The President asked what the dollar loss was to Viet-Nam. He said we ought to do that anyway.

The President asked if Mr. Hilsman had Janow or someone working on it. Mr. Hilsman said Janow and Bob Barnett and the economic people here were working on it already. The President said he would like to have some ideas this morning.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries, Vietnam, 8/29/63. Transcribed by Mabel Karydakis of Hilsman's office.

² Not found.

66. Memorandum of Conference With the President¹

Washington, September 6, 1963—10:30 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

OTHERS PRESENT

Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, Attorney General, Director Murrow, General Taylor, General Krulak, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric, Ambassador Nolting, Assistant Secretary Hilsman, Mr. Helms, Mr. Colby, Mr. Bundy, Mr. Bromley Smith

The meeting began without the President.

Secretary Rusk said that if the situation continues to deteriorate in Vietnam, if our relations with Diem continue to deteriorate, and if U.S. domestic opinion becomes strongly anti-Diem, we will be faced with no alternative short of a massive U.S. military effort. We should direct Ambassador Lodge to tell Diem:

1. That we can foresee a condemnatory resolution in the UN within the next ten days. We will not be in the position to keep this anti-Diem resolution from being passed. Madame Nhu's appearance at the UN would be disastrous.
2. Unless Diem acts promptly, there will be a drastic effect in the U.S. involving both reduction in economic and military assistance and strong pressure to withdraw U.S. political support of Vietnam. He noted that we have not yet used the Lodge/Diem channel. Our urgent task is to gather all the evidence we can on the situation in Vietnam and the effect of recent events on the military effort against the Viet Cong.

Secretary McNamara suggested that we direct General Harkins to see Defense Minister Thuan and get his current views. He may no longer be saying, as he was last week, that Nhu has to go. We also need a military evaluation of what is happening in Vietnam.

Ambassador Nolting suggested that we ask Ambassador Lodge to see Vice President Tho who will have an excellent feel for what effect the recent events have had on the Vietnamese military effort.

There followed a discussion of a statement appearing in the press allegedly quoting General Harkins as saying that recent events had

reduced by 50% the Vietnamese military effort.² General Krulak said General Harkins had consistently reported that the military effort had been affected but not seriously. An effort was being made to find out whether General Harkins had been misquoted. (It later developed that the reporter had misrepresented General Harkins' view which continued to be that the effect on the anti-Viet Cong operations had been limited.)

The Attorney General asked whether we could win the war with Nhu and Diem. Secretary Rusk replied that the answer was no, if the Nhus remained in power and continued along the same lines they have been following. However, the Nhus may change their line.

The Attorney General asked whether the Nhus would change now. He cited press stories saying that we can live with Diem and Nhu. Such stories are certainly read by Diem. The effect is to greatly reduce our bargaining power with Diem. We have to be tough. Ambassador Lodge has to do more than say our President is unhappy. We have to tell Diem that he must do the things we demand or we will have to cut down our effort as forced by the U.S. public.

Mr. Hilsman said he had already sent a cable asking Embassy Saigon how we could cut U.S. programs without hurting the war effort.³

The Attorney General asked if we have concluded that we are going to lose with Diem, why do we not grasp the nettle now.

Secretary Rusk pointed out that Diem would not be relying on press reports for information as to U.S. views. Our actions should be taken in two or three bites. It is very serious to threaten to pull out of Vietnam. If the Viet Cong takes over in Vietnam we are in real trouble. Ambassador Lodge could discount press stories by talking about what has to be done to meet our demands, including the exile of Madame Nhu. On the basis of Ambassador Lodge's talk with Diem, we could then decide on our next move. At that time we might decide to issue an ultimatum.

Mr. Bundy agreed that this was not the moment of decision. When we say we can't win with Diem we are talking of a longer time period. He personally doubted that General Harkins had said that the war effort had fallen off by 50%. He thought we should find out what was on Thuan's mind.

He recalled that Thuan's view that something must be done immediately if the war was to be won had triggered our action of last week end. He thought we should find out whether Thuan's view had changed during the past few days and in the light of the collapse of coup planning.

General Taylor recalled that three weeks ago we still believed that we could win the war with Diem. The Joint Chiefs of Staff shared that view. He asked whether recent events had changed our judgment.

The Attorney General again asked what we should do if we have concluded that we can't win with Diem. Secretary McNamara replied that we can't answer that question because we have insufficient information in Washington.

Secretary Rusk agreed that a reassessment was required. He then read a cable from Ambassador Lodge reporting most recent developments (attached).⁴

Secretary McNamara said we were not asking a showdown with Diem now but a discussion of the current situation.

The Attorney General asked whether we could get the views promptly of U.S. officers working with Vietnamese military units. Secretary McNamara said we could ask General Harkins to do this today. General Taylor said we could get the grass roots military view and suggested that General Krulak go to Vietnam, returning the first of the week, to report on the views of the Vietnamese officers.

Secretary Rusk commented on a report by Marguerite Higgins who had visited the Vietnamese countryside. He thought that Saigon may be such a snake pit that the views of those in Saigon may not be representative. He felt a strong need to try and find out the realities of the situation.

Mr. Murrow said he could ask his station chief to find out the views of the 23 Vietnamese on the USIA payroll.

Secretary Rusk said that his son had received a personal letter from a junior Foreign Service Officer friend now in Vietnam reporting real promise in the war against the Vietcong.

Secretary McNamara recommended that General Krulak go to Saigon and return Monday.⁵ He asked that we get views from British Ambassador

Thompson who is in Saigon.

Mr. Bundy said the crucial question is what are the components of a judgment as to whether we can win the war with Diem.

Secretary Rusk said we can live with the international aspects of the Diem government, but can we win in Vietnam? Can we contain criticism in the U.S.? Mr. Murrow asked that we do not underestimate the harm being done to us internationally by our continued support of Diem. Secretary Rusk replied that if we win in Vietnam, the international aspect will come into line.

Returning to the instructions to Ambassador Lodge, Secretary Rusk said we should make clear that Ambassador Lodge's first substantive meeting with Diem should not be considered a showdown.

Ambassador Nolting urged that we do not use pressure on Diem. To do so, in his opinion, would produce an unfortunate reaction. He asked that we do not talk to Diem about sanctions, but describe to him flatly the situation as we saw it.

Secretary Rusk described our present position as being stage one. There may be no stage two if we decide to pull out. If we pull out, we might tell Diem that we wish him well. Diem may be able to win the war without us, but this is unlikely. Prior to actually pulling out, we might want to consider promoting a coup.

The President entered the meeting at this point. Secretary Rusk summarized the earlier discussion and the draft instructions to Ambassador Lodge.

The President⁶ asked why our goal is to get Nhu out for six months. Is this realistic? Madame Nhu should go abroad but somehow she should be kept from making speeches.

Mr. Bundy asked what is the essential minimum of our demands. Secretary Rusk replied that if the Nhuses stay on their present course we will continue to lose ground.

The President said we should ask Diem to prohibit Madame Nhu from talking. We had a public relations task in the U.S. and worldwide in dealing with Madame Nhu. He asked Ambassador Nolting whether our minimum requirement was the removal of Nhu.

Ambassador Nolting said that on balance he felt that Nhu would have to go. He believed that the departure of Nhu would mean a loss in Vietnam but a gain with U.S. public opinion. He acknowledged the choice was a very close one.

Mr. Bundy said that if Madame Nhu would leave we could live with Nhu remaining in Saigon. He asked again that we try to find out from Thuan whether he believes as he did two weeks ago that Nhu must go if the war is to be won.

Bromley Smith⁷

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Bromley Smith. The meeting was held in the White House. Also published in Declassified Documents, 1982, 649B. A memorandum of discussion at the meeting by Hilsman is in the Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam, White House Meetings, State Memcons.

² A copy of the article by Ed Meagher of the Los Angeles Times, datelined Saigon, September 4, is *ibid.*, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous.

³ Telegram 313 to Saigon, September 3. (Department of State, Central Files, AID (US) S VIET)

⁴ No cable was attached, but this is an apparent reference to [Document 60](#).

⁵ September 9.

⁶ For additional remarks by the President, see [Document 67](#).

⁷ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

67. Editorial Note

At the end of the 10:30 meeting on September 6, 1963 (see [Document 66](#)), the President made the following additional remarks (see [footnote 6](#), [Document 66](#)):

"The discussion then turned to the instructions to Lodge.

"The President asked if it was realistic to demand that brother Nhu should go out. We certainly should insist on Madame Nhu shutting up, if only for the public relations problem here in this country.

"As to brother Nhu, the President asked Mr. Nolting if he would be for his going if we could get him to go. Ambassador Nolting said that as far as the problem here in the US is concerned he was sure that it would be better to have brother Nhu leave. Internally within Viet-Nam he was not at all sure that it would be good to have him go.

"The President said that this should be one of the major purposes of the reassessment that we are undertaking. The President asked what sanctions we should give Lodge in connection with aid. Mr. Hilsman resorted on his appearance before the Senate and the use that Lodge had made of this in Saigon (Deptel 335 and Saigon's 431).

"Ambassador Nolting said that if we want to come out with our marbles we must not present Diem an ultimatum. Even the strongest sanctions would not work. It was OK, however, to talk of American public opinion, Congress, etc.

"The Secretary of State said that Nolting's position was all right for the first stage but, if we do pull out, we must tell Diem in advance saying that we would still wish him well. The point was that a pull-off might well make a military coup probable."
(Memorandum of discussion by Hilsman, September 6; Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam, White House Meetings, State Memcons)

68. Memorandum From the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hughes) to the Secretary of State¹

Washington, September 6, 1963.

SUBJECT

State of Mind of the Nhhus

Two intelligence reports received today² reflect the heightened contempt which Ngo Dinh Nhu, his wife, and other close confidants of the Ngo family hold for the United States as a result of recent developments in South Vietnam.

1.

The first report (TDCS DB-3/656,446) relates to an interview of Madame Nhu's brother, Tran Van Khiem, on August 31 by Denis Warner, a reliable Australian correspondent. Warner informed an American official that Khiem showed him a list of United States Embassy, USIS, USOM, and MACV personnel he was planning to assassinate. Warner indicated that the assassination of Americans would result in the landing of United States Marines within hours to which Khiem replied that there are 20,000 Vietnamese troops in Saigon to meet this eventuality. However, Khiem seemed impressed with Warner's counter that a division of Marines would quickly wipe out any opposing forces.

We do not think that the Vietnamese Government would at this time sanction such acts against American officials. However, we can expect that the current anti-American campaign as reflected in the government-controlled press and in official statements will continue; anti-American rallies or demonstrations are also possible. Khiem is the brother of Madame Nhu, and his own father, the former Vietnamese Ambassador to Washington, Tran Van Chuong, has denounced him as incompetent, corrupted, and cowardly. The last we have heard of Khiem was on August 11 when Secretary of State for the Presidency Thuan informed Ambassador Nolting that Madame Nhu had organized her own secret police squad headed by Khiem. Thuan stated that Nhu himself was possibly also involved. Nolting subsequently

raised this point with Diem-the latter denied it flatly. The above report would indicate that Khiem may actually have some "special security" responsibilities and that Diem was either lying or had been kept ignorant of the development.

2. The second report (TDCS DB-3/656,445) relates to the September 2 article in *Times of Vietnam*³ which charged the United States, and specifically the Central Intelligence Agency, with an attempt to inspire a coup. On September 5, the First Secretary of the German Embassy, passing on information given to him by a *Der Spiegel* correspondent who had interviewed Madame Nhu, told an American official that Madame Nhu admitted she had written most, if not all, of the article. She is reported to have also stated that most of South Vietnam's troubles resulted from false reporting by the American press and from American interference. She even charged that Ambassador Lodge was planning to have her removed or murdered. She added that Diem was too weak and was dependent upon her for support and strength to carry out the struggle against the Viet Cong and other enemies.

We have suspected that the *Times of Vietnam* article was written, or at least inspired, by the Nhuses. Of course, Madame Nhu is aware that we want her to leave, and she probably feels she would be a main target in any coup attempt against the regime. Her statement on Diem recalls a similar public statement of hers about a month ago and one which touched Diem on a very sensitive point.

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Vietnam-Policy. Secret; Limit Distribution; No Foreign Dissem/No Dissem Abroad/Background Use Only. Drafted by Allen S. Whiting, Director of the Office of Research and Analysis for the Far East, and Leo G. Sarris of that office.

² Both dated September 5, neither printed. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, CIA Cables)

³ On September 2 the *Times of Vietnam* published a front-page story under a headline entitled "CIA Financing Planned Coup D'Etat," which had as its central premise that the CIA in conjunction with the Viet Cong spent millions of dollars to try to overthrow the Diem government on August 28. See Mecklin, *Mission in Torment*, pp. 201-203, regarding the role of the *Times of Vietnam* and its acting editor, Ann Gregory, in Vietnamese politics.

69. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, September 6, 1963.

0698. 1. With approval Ambassador Lodge, CAS applied during morning 6 Sept for interview with Ngo Dinh Nhu. Nhu set interview for afternoon same day and we had two-hour conversation.

2. Apparently Minister Luong had already talked with Nhu about Tran Van Khiem matter (CAS Saigon 0647).² Nhu assured CAS there was nothing to this. Said either Khiem or SEPES³ personnel through Khiem were attempting restore SEPES. This would go nowhere as Diem had reached final decision not to reestablish SEPES. According to Nhu, Diem has "physical allergy" to Khiem and would not think of allowing him either role or office. Khiem has no agents or anything else. Nhu had not talked with Khiem as result these reports but Madame Nhu has done so. Khiem had said to Madame Nhu that if he was to have no role in Vietnamese life he would prefer to go abroad. In sum Nhu debunked report and gave assurances about Khiem.

3. We then discussed 2 Sept *Times of Vietnam* article.⁴ Nhu alleged he had nothing whatever to do with article and claims he had not even read it. Stated that he did not hide himself behind backsides of a woman, in this instance referring specifically to Mrs. Gregory. He surmised in passing that Gregorys may have obtained some of their information from American sources but did not emphasize this line. CAS did not raise question of Madame Nhu's role nor did he.

4. Nhu stated he wished explicitly authorize CAS and station to proceed with all station programs of joint nature. Volunteered that Diem, he, Thuan and Luong and others had approved these programs. Nhu considers the programs invaluable in support of counterinsurgency which, he continues to claim, is his primary interest. Stating he had previously said he had no political or power ambition he modified this to say he has primary ambition after all, which he describes as winning counter-subversive war because of its importance not only to South Vietnam but also because of bearing counter-subversive war has on Cambodia, Laos, and other countries of SEA and on struggle of free world. At conclusion our conversation, he again stressed his desire we

continue joint programs. Without CAS putting question to him, Nhu disclaimed any role in attack on Agency.

5. Nhu seems convinced some Americans (unidentified) arranged sanctuary of three bonzes in American Embassy. When CAS expressed complete disbelief, Nhu admitted arrival of three bonzes probably came as surprise to Embassy officials but continued to claim GVN in possession telephone tap indicating that (unidentified) American had been behind this episode. He did not elaborate on problem constituted by bonzes in Embassy nor did CAS press him on this matter.

6. Nhu feels there are too many American civilians in Saigon and that some of these personnel are maintaining continual campaign of anti-GVN criticism. Did not name them but expressed view that this was matter for internal discipline of U.S. Mission, not for GVN action. Nhu seems to think number of American civilians in Saigon should be reduced and states he was asked at Interministerial Committee on Strategic Hamlets meeting morning 6 Sept about presence U.S. military advisors. Had answered question to effect that military advisors should be increased where they were needed and effective and decreased where contrary situation prevailed. Said nothing about any reduction in military establishment.

7. With respect to negotiations with Hanoi, Nhu said Italian Ambassador D'Orlandi and Indian High Commissioner Goburdhun had asked him to see Polish ICC Commissioner Maneli to find out "what was in his stomach". Maneli had made several previous efforts to talk with Nhu but had not been received. As result of D'Orlandi and Goburdhun's persuasion, Nhu received Maneli about three days ago. Maneli expressed view that Nhu should take advantage of De Gaulle and Ho Chi Minh declarations⁴ and to enter into negotiations with Hanoi. Maneli said he had been authorized by Pham Van Dong to act as intermediary. He suggested to Nhu that SVN could sell rice and beer to North Vietnam in return for coal. Volunteered to be at Nhu's services any hour of day or night. Maneli told Nhu he was only man in SVN who could dare to undertake such negotiations.

8. Nhu claims he answered Maneli to effect that, while De Gaulle's statement was interesting, only combatants in this war had right to speak and act. SVN is allied with U.S. and it would be "immoral act" to explore such a problem unilaterally behind backs of Americans. Commercial relations with North Vietnam would have inevitable political repercussions on fighting morale and political clarity of SVN population.

Maneli asked what was next step and Nhu said he replied "continue building strategic hamlets". To CAS Nhu said he has no secret channel to Hanoi but could communicate through Goburdhun or Maneli if he wished. His contacts are with Viet Cong in SVN and his objective with them is to win them over against North Vietnam. Nhu stated he believes the guerrilla war would be greatly advanced in SVN favor by end of 1963 and that at some future time SVN and U.S. might be able negotiate with North Vietnam from position of strength. He states he is adamantly opposed to neutralism, although CAS had not brought up this subject. Neutralism, according to Nhu, is completely contrary to GVN's outlook and policy.

9. Without specifying, Maneli [told Nhu?] Saigon GVN would soon have four enemies against it, presumably including U.S. Nhu says he answered Maneli with comment that GVN accustomed to being attacked from many sides and would prefer go down with dignity than to live on knees. Nhu told CAS that neither GVN nor any other government could possibly negotiate with Hanoi either openly or secretly, except after having won guerrilla war and not in terms of neutralization but rather within framework of strong SVN seeking to incorporate North Vietnam within free world order.

10. On Buddhist question, Nhu said he had been off on vacation with family, 8 May and had not participated immediately in crisis which exploded that date. Buddhist problem advanced too far and too fast, reaching final point where surgery was necessary to survival of government and conduct of war. Still claims he had nothing to do with declaration of martial law or with attacks on pagodas. Denies he manipulated Secret Police or Colonel Tung's forces. When general officers saw Diem evening 18 August to propose martial law, claims Diem asked Nhu what Generals wanted see him about at that hour and Nhu surmised to Diem that probably they wanted take up question of new Chief of Staff. Nhu claims general officers informed him on 19 August of their discussion with Diem. During general officers/Diem meeting on 18 Aug, Diem approved martial law in principle, asked that bonzes not be harmed, and recommended that military legal officer be present at pagodas to see that military forces acted in accordance with law. Nhu claims military found this last stipulation unrealistic and impractical. Nhu said General Do Cao Tri had visited him about 19 or 20 August and initiated discussion on what General Tri intended to do during martial law. Tri brought out notebook indicating precise steps he intended take and persons he would arrest. Nhu commented that Tri said he had been planning for the action over the past preceding month.

Nhu stated to CAS that he is "scapegoat" of entire affair, although said at same time that situation had reached point where surgical action necessary. The [He?] says there was no meeting of civilian leaders after Diem/general officers session of 18 Aug (contrary to Minister Hieu's report (FVS 9513)).⁵

Nhu said that, apart from surgical operation of 21 August, he has been for policy of conciliation and continues to be now. He said this was another part of Diem's stipulations during his session with Generals on 18 August, i.e., that martial law and removal of Buddhists to home pagodas would not constitute breach of his policy of conciliation.

11. CAS asked Nhu how long he thought martial law would last. Nhu answered that he had no idea. He felt persistence of martial law was dangerous to government and commented that martial law was having psychological effect on general officers which he thought could become a serious problem. During today's meeting of Interministerial Committee on Strategic Hamlets, general officers had raised question of their participating in Cabinet positions within government and problems relating to general style structure. Nhu had answered them to effect that Interministerial Committee was not proper forum nor did this lie within his responsibility. CAS impression is that Nhu is in fact worried about changes in general officers' outlook and increasing demands from their side for participation in government.

12. Nhu gave some time to discussing how his children found life at Gia Long unpleasant and unlike normal lives led by other children. They felt they did not have playmates like other young people, could not walk down the street normally, were surrounded by too many servants, and would much rather live in villa somewhere in other part of SVN, like their villa at Dalat. Nhu said that he had to take this family problem seriously because psychological wounds of this kind in childhood could have lasting effects into adult life. (CAS had impression, as result Nhu's emphasis on this subject, that Nhu might be laying ground work for his temporary withdrawal.)

13. Nhu's comments are contrary to information we have received from other sources. See no point in trying to elaborate on his sincerity or insincerity but do not exclude that there are various substantial elements of deception involved in his statements. This would not be unnatural in power and politics. He claims to want to go forward with [as] U.S. ally and that he recognized fully American contribution to winning guerrilla war. I had no impression from this meeting that Nhu was inclined

toward significant cutback in American presence of programs. He again claimed he is not anti-American. Discussion was conducted on both sides in friendly, dispassionate manner. Nhu was looking well.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is a copy sent by the CIA to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. Also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. There is no time of transmission from Saigon on the source text, but it was received at the Department of State at 7:15 p.m.

² Not found.

³ SEPES, Service des Etudes Politiques et Sociales (Political and Social Studies Service), was the name of Ngo Dinh Nhu's secret police.

⁴ See [footnote 3, Document 68](#).

⁴ See [footnote 7, Document 26](#), and [footnote 3, Document 44](#).

⁵ Not found.

70. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 6, 1963—7:42 p.m.

348. Eyes only Ambassador Lodge.

1. Following is result of highest level meeting today.²
2. It is clear that as a minimum we face a major problem with world, with US Congress and with American public which will require GVN to take actions to restore its image so that we may continue to support it. These actions include effective silencing and probably removal from country of Madame Nhu, releasing of bonzes, students, etc., along lines we have discussed.
3. What is not clear is whether these measures will suffice to restore sufficient confidence in the Diem Government within Viet-Nam to permit them to win the war.
4. Sense of meeting was that if the answer to this second question is that additional measures, such as departure of Nhu, are essential, and if we cannot obtain these additional measures after negotiating with Diem, then US faced with question whether to apply sanctions with all their risks rather than let situation get steadily worse.
5. At present there are two missing ingredients necessary to make a judgment. First is information on Vietnamese attitudes, and septel³ describes actions we are taking this regard in addition to those you already have underway.
6. The second missing ingredient is Diem's attitude. You should initiate dialogue with Diem soonest. Purpose of this is not for showdown negotiations or ultimatum (since we not yet decided on ultimate sanctions to be used) but rather to afford you and us an opportunity to clarify present situation and assess future moves—e.g., to express clearly and authoritatively considerations US side and to ascertain Diem's future plans and policies in the light these considerations. You must dispel any idea Diem may have gotten from recent press reports that everything is okay in US-GVN relations and make him understand that we are coming to a point where our sensitivity is as important as his, stressing that we have a common problem to work out to permit us to proceed together towards our joint objective of winning the war against the Viet Cong.

7. You should hit hard on consequences of now inevitable UN debate and difficulty US would have in supporting GVN there in present circumstances (you should, incidentally, make it absolutely clear that Madame Nhu's presence at UN would be disaster.) Second, you should elaborate difficulties with US public opinion and Congress using Hilsman meeting with Far East Subcommittee⁴ and statements of Lausche and Church reported septels.⁵
8. You should also emphasize to Diem extreme time urgency—we have only ten days before UN debate for GVN to restore its image.
9. You should also emphasize that while the problem here and in UN created by GVN acts may or may not be aggravated by press distortions problem is big and real and only GVN acts can solve it.
10. At the outset you should stress the points that relate to the public opinion problem (para 2 above)—e.g., release of remaining students and bonzes, removal press censorship, restoration of pagodas, etc., as developed along lines generally agreed in our preceding exchanges, leaving to later discussions additional measures we may think necessary in light of results of assessment described para. 5 above and septel.
11. We have some doubts here about reliance upon [*less than 1 line not declassified*] to explain US position to Nhu and/or Diem. They can obviously be useful allies, but your own authoritative discussion of these issues seems to us indispensable.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared in draft with Bundy, Rusk, and Harriman. Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD exclusive for Felt. A copy was also sent to the President at Hyannis Port. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cable 11) Also published in Declassified Documents, 1982, 592 B.

² See [Document 66](#).

³ Document 71.

⁴ See [Document 63](#).

⁵ In telegram 341 to Saigon, September 6, the Department of State informed the Embassy that Senator Frank Lausche, Chairman of the Far Eastern Subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee, publicly supported and concurred with the sentiments expressed in the President's interview of September 2 that oppression of the Buddhists in Vietnam

was not an answer to that country's critical situation and grave problems. In telegram 356 to Saigon, September 7, the Department reported that Senator Frank Church had introduced a nonbinding sense of the Senate resolution calling for a cut-off of U.S. aid to South Vietnam unless the Diem government introduced drastic reforms. (Both in Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET) The text of the proposed Church resolution is in telegram 392 to Saigon, September 12. (*Ibid.*, AID (US) S VIET)

71. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 6, 1963—7:43 p.m.

349. Eyes only. Re para. 5 Deptel 348.²

1. It has been decided to make an intensive effort to obtain at first hand information on attitudes toward GVN held by wide spectrum of populace. It is desired to determine trends in opinion since May 8 and what feelings are now. Maj. Gen. Krulak, USMC, and FSO-2 Joseph A. Mendenhall departing today, Sept. 6, to participate in this effort to poll opinion in as short a time as possible. Proposed questions to elicit information required septel.³ Krulak will coordinate his efforts with MACV and Mendenhall will with Embassy. It is not intended that Mendenhall's effort impinge or supplant Embassy's efforts in this field, particularly provincial reporting section.
2. Mendenhall plans spend one day Saigon and one day Hue and provinces. Please arrange transportation and notify Helble, including purpose of trip. Mendenhall also should talk with provincial reporters. (Mendenhall holds Diplomatic Passport 18608, issued June 4, 1959 and valid for travel Viet-Nam, but no entry visa. Request Embassy obtain entry visa Saigon and provide Mendenhall travel advance and any other assistance needed.)
3. To supplement these efforts and cover as wide range of opinion as possible it is desired that Mecklin and Phillips USOM utilize USIS and USOM field facilities and personnel respectively to parallel effort of Krulak and Mendenhall. It is possible that Mecklin and perhaps Phillips will be asked to return with Krulak and Mendenhall for a personal report.
4. In addition to above, Harkins should see Thuan to determine if his views have changed since last conversation, and Lodge may desire see Vice President Tho.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 VIET-US. Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Koren and Hilsman.

[2](#) Document 70.

[3](#) Document 73.

72. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 7, 1963, 2 p.m.

434. CINCPAC for POLAD—exclusive for Admiral Felt. Eyes only for Secretary. Herewith report of meeting from 6 to 8:15 p.m. Friday² between [less than 1 line not declassified] and Nhu.

1. [less than 1 line not declassified] stressed the urgent crisis created by the situation in US Senate described in Hilsman's no. 335³ to me. They explained that passage of a resolution described in the telegram would be an irreversible action and would commit every Senator voting for it to vote against further appropriations.
2. They think Nhu was shaken by this news which evidently he had not expected. Nhu said he had expected me to come back, apparently, "to negotiate" with him about his resignation. [less than 1 line not declassified] said that there was nothing for me to negotiate; that I, from a background of 25 years in US public life, had given my very best advice, which was for him to leave the country immediately for six months. It was up to him to take the advice or to reject it. There was nothing to haggle over.
- 3.

Then came a long tirade by Nhu who lost his usual impassive composure and walked up and down. Some of his statements were:

- a. "I'm the winning horse—they should bet on me. Why do they want to finish me? I want to be—not the adviser to Pres. Diem—but the adviser to Henry Cabot Lodge.
- b. "I may leave the country after a month and what if 100 Strategic Hamlets go over to the Communists while I am away?
- c. "I am alarmed by what's going on in the Armed Forces. If I leave, the Armed Forces will take over the government. 'Ces grenouillards' (which I translate as "these schemers" or 'these contrivers') of the CIA and USIS will sabotage the war effort."

FYI: This is first admission I have seen that Army was worrying him. Nhu also said he was burning his papers.

4. Madame Nhu is to leave on Monday⁴ —for a two or three months “rest” in Europe.
5. Nhu stressed he would not consider leaving country, but would formally resign without retaining any connection with Strategic Hamlets. After a “number of months” had gone by he might consider leaving for a period of 3 or 4 months. When he did resign he would not deny that he had been kicked out. He would also consider any piece of legislation which would help to appease Buddhists, deal with Decree Law 10 and rebuild pagodas.

Comment: Believe it was good tactics for [*less than 1 line not declassified*] to see Nhu without me, as they obviously have no axe to grind. Am sure Nhu will not leave, but am also sure that news in Hilsman's telegram has shaken him. Planning Monday meeting with Diem, using Hilsman telegram, Deptel no. 331⁵ on situation in UN and anything else you may send me on Vietnamese interest in Congress.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Received at 3:02 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House and CIA.

² September 6.

³ Document 63.

⁴ September 9.

⁵ In telegram 331, September 5, the Department of State informed the Embassy in Saigon that the Afro-Asian bloc in the United Nations had requested inscription of the Buddhist issue in South Vietnam as an “urgent and important” item on the upcoming General Assembly agenda. The Department instructed the Embassy to inform the Diem government that unless “far-reaching and well publicized steps towards settlement of the outstanding issues with the Buddhists” were taken, South Vietnam could expect substantive debate on the issue and a condemnatory resolution. If the South Vietnamese did not implement reforms, the United States would not oppose a resolution calling on the Republic of Vietnam to respect the principles of religious freedom and human rights. (Department of State, Central Files, SOC 14-15 VIET)

II. Period of Interlude, September 7-October 22, 1963: Assessment of the Progress of the War, U.S. Efforts To Reform the Diem Government, The McNamara-Taylor Mission to Vietnam and Report, U.S. Policy on Coup Plotting in Vietnam

[73. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, September 7, 1963—12:43 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Kattenburg, cleared with Sarris in draft, and approved by Hilsman. Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD.

[74. Telegram From the White House to the President, at Squaw Island, Massachussets](#)

Washington, September 7, 1963—10:43 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret; Priority; Eyes Only. Sent from the White House Situation Room to the President for delivery on the morning of September 8. The President did not clear the cable to Lodge; a note on the source text reads, "not sent to Saigon."

[75. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, September 9, 1963, 5 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, SOC 14-1 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Received at 5:54 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House.

76. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, September 9, 1963, noon.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Received at 6:41 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House at 7:15 a.m.

77. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, September 9, 1963, 11 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, SOC 14-1 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Received at 2:38 p.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House and CIA at 4:30 p.m.

78. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of the State

Saigon, September 9, 1963, 8 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 2 S VIET. Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution. Received at 2:49 p.m. Repeated to CINCPAC.

79. Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)

Washington, September 9, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret.

80. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency

Saigon, September 10, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, South Vietnam Policy File, August 31 through September 15, 1963. Secret. There is no time of transmission on the source text.

81. Memorandum From the Counselor for Public Affairs of the Embassy in Vietnam (Mecklin) to the Director of the United States Information Agency (Murrow)

En Route to Washington, September 10, 1963.

Source. Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret. Murrow sent this memorandum to McGeorge Bundy under a cover.: g memorandum, September 10. According to his account in *Mission in Torment*, pp. 206-207, Mecklin received instructions on September 7 to return to Washington with Mendenhall and Krulak with no real idea of what was expected of him. He wrote this memorandum on the plane. In Usito 66 to Saigon for Mecklin only, September 6, Murrow gave Mecklin the following guidelines: "We particularly interested in changes if any in attitudes toward Diem Govt, Nhu and wife, and will to push war against Viet Cong to successful conclusion. In addition other contacts, you may wish draw on knowledgeable USIS local employees, particularly those attached to VN Information Service, in preparing assessment." (Washington National Records Center, RG 306, USIA/TOP Files: FRC 67 A 222, IAF-1963)

82. Report by the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (Krulak)

En route to Washington, September 10, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret.

83. Memorandum of Conversation

Washington, September 10, 1963—10:30 a.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam, White House Meetings, State Memcons. Top Secret; Eyes Only. The meeting was held at the White House. Drafted by Hilsman. Bromley Smith's record of this meeting, published in part in Declassified Documents, 1982, 650A, is in the Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda, Meetings on Vietnam. Krulak's record of this meeting is in National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Trip to Vietnam, September 7-10.

84. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) and Senator Frank Church

Washington, September 10, 1963—11:55 a.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Memoranda of Conversations. Drafted by Hilsman.

85. Memorandum of Conversation

Washington, September 10, 1963—5:45 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. The meeting was held in the Department of State. Also published in part in Declassified Documents, 1982, 650B. A memorandum for the record of this meeting by Krulak is in the National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Trip to Vietnam, September 7-10.

86. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, September 11, 1963, 2 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Received at 3:16 a.m. and passed to the White House and CIA at 4:48 a.m.

87. Memorandum for the Record of Discussion at the Daily White House Staff Meeting

Washington, September 11, 1963, 8 a.m.

Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by Major William Y Smith, Taylor's aide.

88. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)

Washington, September 11, 1963—11:35 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Phyllis D. Bernau.

89. Paper Prepared by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, September 11, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries, Vietnam, Undated. There is no drafting information on the source text, but this is apparently the first paper Bundy asked Hilsman to prepare; see Document 85.

90. Paper Prepared by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, September 11, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries, Vietnam, Undated. Secret. There is no drafting information on the source text, but this is apparently the second paper Bundy asked Hilsman to prepare; see Document 85.

[91. Memorandum Prepared by Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff](#)

Washington, September 11, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous, Part 1. Secret. There is no drafting information on the source text, but this is apparently the paper Bundy asked Forrestal to prepare; see Document 85.

[92. Research Memorandum From the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research \(Hughes\) to the Secretary of State](#)

Washington, September 11, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, Pol 15 Gov't. Secret; No Foreign Dissem; Limit Distribution.

[93. Memorandum of Conversation](#)

Washington, September 11, 1963, 6 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. The meeting was held at the White House. The source text indicates the President did not attend the meeting. A memorandum for the record of this meeting by Krulak is in the National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Trip to Vietnam, September 7-10.

[94. Memorandum of Conference With the President](#)

Washington, September 11, 1963, 7 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. The meeting was held in the White House.

95. Memorandum From the Director of the United States Information Agency (Morrow) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, September 11, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, PR-11, Press Relations. Confidential.

96. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (Krulak)

Saigon, September 12, 1963—11:55 a.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to CINCPAC exclusive for Felt. Krulak sent copies to General Wheeler, General LeMay, Admiral MacDonald, and General Shoup, and to Bundy at the White House; McCone at the CIA; and Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman at the Department of State.

97. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, September 12, 1963, 4 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared by Rusk and Bromley Smith. Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD exclusive to Felt.

98. Draft Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, September 12, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Secret. Drafted by Rusk. In a telephone call to Hilsman, at 8:23 p.m., September 11, Rusk discussed the drafting of this telegram: "Sec said he would go home tonight and draft a fairly long discursive message to Lodge to give his own views on paper but H might go ahead on the letter idea. Sec would think that is the means by which we try to get this fellow on board there through persuasion without at this stage a lot of other things that go along with it. Sec replied it would be a presidential letter. H will be sending Lodge cable tonight and will call Sec tonight on WH phone." (Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations) Regarding the Presidential letter, see Document 115. The cable Hilsman mentioned is presumably telegram 391, Document 97. There is no record of another telephone conversation between Hilsman and Rusk on the night of September 11. The cable printed here was not sent; see *Infra*.

99. Memorandum for the Record of a Meeting

Washington, September 12, 1963, 6 p.m.

Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-186-69. Top Secret; Sensitive. Drafted by Krulak. The meeting was held at the White House.

100. Editorial Note

101. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, September 12, 1963—9:38 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET Top Secret; Priority. The text of this message was sent from the White House.

102. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, September 13, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Top Secret. There is no time of transmission on the source text. Received at 7:02 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House at 7:30 a.m.

103. Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)

Washington, September 13, 1963—10:10 a.m.

Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Mildred Leatherman of Harriman's staff.

104. Letter From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Secretary of State

Saigon, September 13, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Correspondence-L. Top Secret; Eyes Only.

105. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)

Washington, September 13, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, South Vietnam Policy, August 31 through September 15, 1963. Top Secret. In a covering memorandum to Rusk, September 14, an assistant to McCone informed him that McCone's summary was of a cable "from a senior CIA headquarters official who

has paid a recent visit to Saigon." Copies were also sent to McNamara and McGeorge Bundy. Also included as an attachment was a copy of CIA telegram 0890 from Saigon, September 13, the telegram which McCone is summarizing.

[106. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, September 14, 1963, 1 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Top Secret; Priority. Received at 3:11 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House at 4:44 a.m.

[107. Letter From the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs \(Harriman\) to the Ambassador in Vietnam \(Lodge\)](#)

Washington, September 14, 1963.

Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Vietnam Policy. Personal and Confidential.

[108. Memorandum From the Director of the United States Information Agency \(Murrow\) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs \(Bundy\)](#)

Washington, September 14, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Confidential.

[109. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, September 15, 1963, noon.

Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, South Vietnam Policy File, August 31 through September 15, 1963. Top Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared by Rusk and Harriman.

[110. Memorandum From the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research \(Hughes\) to the Secretary of State](#)

Washington, September 15, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Action Plan. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Also published in Declassified Documents, 1982, 593 A.

[111. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, September 16, 1963, 5 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Top Secret; Immediate. Received at 6:19 a.m. and passed to the White House, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and CIA.

[112. Memorandum for the Record of the Daily White House Staff Meeting](#)

Washington, September 16, 1963, 8 a.m.

Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by W.Y. Smith.

[113. Memorandum for the Record of a Meeting](#)

Washington, September 16, 1963, 11 a.m.

Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-647-71. Top Secret; Sensitive. Drafted by Krulak. The meeting was held at the Department of State.

[114. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs \(Hilsman\) to the Secretary of State](#)

Washington, September 16, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous, Part 11. Top Secret; Eyes Only. There is no drafting information on the source text, but the memorandum was drafted by Hilsman with the assistance of officers in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs. (Hilsman, To Move a Nation, p. 506; Department of State, Office of the Historian, Vietnam Interviews, Roger Hilsman, May 15, 1984) A handwritten note on the source text indicates that the attached cables had been revised.

[115. Draft Letter From President Kennedy to President Diem](#)

Washington, September 16, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous, Part II. Top Secret; Eyes Only. There is no drafting information on the source text, but this letter was prepared by Hilsman and others at the Department of State. The source text is labeled: "Suggested Draft of Presidential Letter, Adapted to Phase 1 of This Plan."

[116. Memorandum From Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs \(Bundy\)](#)

Washington, September 16, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous, Part 11. Top Secret, Eyes Only.

117. Editorial Note

118. Memorandum of Conversation Between the Director of the Vietnam Working Group (Kattenburg) and Madame Tran Van Chuong

Washington, September 16, 1963, 8 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET. Secret. Drafted by Kattenburg on September 17. On a copy of this memorandum sent to the White House, Forrestal wrote: "Family life in Vietnam", and next to Madame Chuong's threat to run over her daughter: "Mother love." (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous, Part II)

119. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency

Saigon, September 17, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, South Vietnam Policy Files, September 16-30, 1963. Secret. There is no time of transmission on the source text.

120. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)

Washington, September 17, 1963—12:01 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Phyllis D. Bernau.

121. Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (Krulak) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff(Taylor)

Washington, September 17, 1963.

Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-186-69. Top Secret; Sensitive.

122. Memorandum From the Deputy Regional Planning Adviser of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (Mendenhall) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, September 17, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, POL 25 Buddhist Dispute. Secret.

123. Memorandum by the Assistant Director for Rural Affairs, United States Operations Mission, Vietnam (Phillips)

Washington, September 17, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. An attached note from Forrestal to McGeorge Bundy, September 17, reads: "This does not add to what you already know; but I still think that Phillips' judgments of Vietnamese reactions are as good as any we have. If you think of it, he is the only reporter we have with first hand-long term knowledge of this situation both in Saigon and in the field."

124. Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff

Washington, September 17, 1963—4:20 p.m.

Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations.
Transcribed by Mildred Leatherman.

125. Telegram From the White House to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, September 17, 1963—9:28 p.m.

Source: Washington Federal Records Center, RG 84, Saigon Embassy Files: FRC 68 A 5159, SGN (63) 19 GVN. Top Secret; Flash; Eyes Only. Prepared in the White House and sent to the Department of State for transmission to Saigon. Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, pp. 545-547. In a memorandum to Rusk, McNamara, McCone, Harriman, and Robert Kennedy, September 17, Bundy stated that he drafted this cable. Bundy attached a draft of CAP 63516 which was similar although not identical to the text printed here. Bundy's memorandum reads in part: "I have taken the liberty of doing a draft of a possible instruction that would initiate action under what we are now calling Phase I of Track 2—namely, a final effort of persuasion and pressure short of a decision to dump the regime no matter what." (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous, Part II)

126. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, September 18, 1963, 5 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. Received at 7:58 a.m. and passed to the White House at 8:25 a.m.

127. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)

Washington, September 18, 1963—10:05 a.m.

Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations. No Distribution. Transcribed by Mildred Leatherman.

[128. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, September 18, 1963—4:52 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. Drafted in the White House and sent to the Department of State for transmission to Saigon. Bundy's covering memorandum to Rusk, September 18, reads: "As I said on the telephone, the President is very clear in his mind that he wants this to go out at once, but I am sure he would be responsive to any amendment you yourself would wish to propose to him." On the White House draft of this telegram there is a marginal note indicating that McNamara also received a copy. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables) Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, p. 548.

[129. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, September 19, 1963, noon.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Received at 5:54 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House at 7:10 a.m.

[130. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, September 19, 1963, 4 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central files, POL 15 S VIET Top Secret; Immediate Eyes Only. Received at 7:04 a.m. and passed to the White House at 8:35 a.m.

131. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, September 19, 1963, 4 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET Top Secret; Immediate. Received at 7:16 a.m. and passed to the White House at 8:02 a.m.

132. Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, September 19, 1963—10:23 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Phyllis D. Bernau.

133. Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Bundy) to the Secretary of Defense (McNamara)

Washington, September 19, 1963.

Source: Department of State, William R Bundy Papers, Chron (ISA) 1963. Top Secret.

134. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Felt)

Saigon, September 19, 1963—7:47 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to Lodge. Received at 12:11 p.m. JCS sent it to the White

House exclusive for Bundy; to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman; and to the CIA exclusive for Helms.

[135. Memorandum for the Record by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff \(Taylor\)](#)

Washington, September 19, 1963.

Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-186-69. Confidential.

[136. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs \(Hilsman\) to the Secretary of State](#)

Washington, September 19, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, POL 15 Gov't. Secret. Drafted by Kattenburg and signed by Hilsman. A note on the source text indicates that Rusk saw it. Copies were sent to Ball, Harriman, Forrestal, Colby, William K. Bunce of USIA, Albert L. Whiting, Krulak, Heinz, U. Alexis Johnson, Rostow, and Manning.

[137. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, September 20, 1963, 4 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. Received at 4:13 a.m. and passed to the White House at 5:07 a.m. On another copy of this telegram, there is a marginal note indicating that the President saw it. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables)

[138. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, September 20, 1963, 5 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Priority; Eyes Only. Received at 5:48 a.m. and passed to the White House.

[139. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam \(Harkins\) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific \(Felt\)](#)

Saigon, September 20, 1963—6:55 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Secret; Immediate; Personal. Also sent personal to Taylor. A note on the source text indicates that the President saw this cable. Received at the JCS at 9:54 a.m. The JCS relayed this message to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman; to CIA exclusive for Helms; and to the White House exclusive for Bundy.

[140. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, September 20, 1963—7:40 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, AID (US) S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared with Forrestal, William Bundy, and Janow of AID. On another copy of this telegram there is a marginal note indicating that the President read it. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables)

[141. Editorial Note](#)

[142. Memorandum From the President to the Secretary of Defense \(McNamara\)](#)

Washington, September 21, 1963.

Source: Washington National Records Center, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, Report 10/2/63. Top Secret. McGeorge Bundy sent Rusk a copy of this memorandum under cover of a memorandum, September 21, which reads as follows: "This is the McNamara instruction as the President finally approved it today. Bob asked me to take back to him the additional sentence which you and I discussed yesterday, saying that his notes showed that the President specifically approved this addition. I did take it back to the President and he did approve it, although I presented the arguments against it as you and I have discussed them. I don't think it's a major matter." (Department of State, Central Files, ORG 7 OSD) There is no indication on the source text to which sentence Bundy is referring. Attached to another copy is a draft of this memorandum with revisions in Bundy's handwriting. The major revision is the insertion at the end of the first paragraph of the sentence beginning 'If the prognosis in your judgment'2 There are two other minor revisions in Bundy's hand. The first is the insertion, in the second sentence of the second paragraph, of the phrase, ', consult fully with Ambassador Lodge on, and the second is the substitution in the first and only sentence of the third paragraph of a call, for your formal call." (Kennedy Library, National security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous) This memorandum was sent to Saigon eyes only for Lodge in an unnumbered telegram, September 22. (Department of state, Central Files, POL US-MCNAMARA) Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, pp. 551-552.

143. Memorandum for the Record

Washington, September 23, 1963, 10 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, ORG 7 OSD. Top Secret. Drafted by McGeorge Bundy who sent a copy to Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman under cover of a memorandum, September 23, which noted: "The last sentence of the first paragraph of the instructions was inserted by the President after I reported the divergent views on it to him at Bob McNamara's request." The meeting was held at the White House.

144. Letter From the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)

Washington, September 23, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam. Top Secret; Personal and Private. Drafted by Hilsman.

[145. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs \(Harriman\) and Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff](#)

Washington, September 23, 1963.

Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Dolores Perruso.

[146. Memorandum for the Record by Lieutenant Colonel Sidney Berry, Jr.](#)

En Route to Saigon, September 23, 1963.

Source: Washington Federal Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, Back Up Documents and Notes, 9/25/63-Trip to SVN. Secret.

[147. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, September 24, 1963—9:25 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET-US. Top Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared in draft with Harriman and McGeorge Bundy. Repeated to USUN eyes only for Secretary Rusk.

[148. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, September 25, 1963—4:24 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, AID (US) S VIET Top Secret, Priority. Drafted by Mendenhall; cleared by Barnett, Bundy, and in substance by Janow of AID; and approved by Hilsman.

[149. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency](#)

Saigon, September 26, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, South Vietnam Policy Files, September 16-30, 1963. Secret. There is no time of transmission on the source text.

[150. Report by the Secretary of Defense \(McNamara\)](#)

Saigon, September 26, 1963.

Source: Washington National Record Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, Back-up Documents and Notes, 9/25/63—Trip to SVN. Secret.

[151. Memorandum Prepared for the Director of Central Intelligence \(McCone\)](#)

Washington, September 26, 1963.

Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 306, USIA/TOP Files: FRC 67 A 222, IAF-1963. Secret. Prepared in the CIA and transmitted to the Director of USIA by Ray S. Cline, Deputy Director (Intelligence).

[152. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, September 27, 1963, noon.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, AID (US) S VIET. Top Secret; Priority; Eyes Only. Received at 1:36 a.m. and passed to the White House and to Rusk at USUN.

[153. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, September 27, 1963, 6 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, INF 8 US. Top Secret. Received at 2:53 p.m. A handwritten note on the source text indicates it was passed to the White House.

[154. Report by the Secretary of Defense \(McNamara\)](#)

Saigon, undated.

Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, Back Up Documents and Notes 9/25/63-Trip to SVN. Secret.

[155. Editorial Note](#)

[156. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, September 27, 1963, 9 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, AID (US) S VIET. Top Secret; Priority; Eyes Only. Received at 10:18 a.m. and passed to the White House at 12:48 p.m. and to Rusk at USUN at 1 p.m.

157. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, September 28, 1963—1:30 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret; Priority. Drafted by Mendenhall; cleared with McGeorge Bundy, Ball, and Harriman; and approved by Hilsman.

158. Memorandum of Conversation

Saigon, September 29, 1963, 2:30-5:30 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 7 US/McNamara. Secret. Drafted by Flott and transmitted to the Department of State as an enclosure to airgram A-244 from Saigon, October 3. According to the airgram, the memorandum was not cleared with the participants. A summary of the conversation was transmitted in telegram 612 from Saigon. (Ibid., ORG 7 OSD) The meeting was held at the Gia Long Palace. A record of this discussion is printed in part in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, vol. II, pp. 749-751.

159. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, September 30, 1963, 7 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, ORG 7 OSD. Secret; Limit Distribution. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House.

160. Memorandum of a Conversation by the Secretary of Defense (McNamara)

Saigon, September 30, 1963.

Source: Washington Federal Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, Back-up Documents and Notes 9/25/63-Trip to SVN.

Secret.

161. Memorandum by the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' Special Assistant (Sullivan)

Saigon, September 30, 1963.

Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, Back up Documents and Notes, 9/25/63-Trip to SVN. Top Secret.

162. Memorandum for the Record by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)

Saigon, October 1, 1963.

Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, Back-up Documents and Notes, 9/25/63-Trip to SVN. Secret. This was the second private meeting between Taylor and Minh. The first, as Taylor recounts in *Swords and Plowshares*, pp. 297-298, was on the tennis court at the Saigon Officers Club on September 29 with Secretary McNamara as a spectator. The two Americans were under the impression Minh had an important message for them, but Minh refused to be drawn out by what Taylor later described as "broad hints of our interest in other subjects which we gave him during breaks in the game." In a memorandum to McNamara, September 30, Taylor explained the misunderstanding as follows: "Colonel Jones, one of our tennis players yesterday, at my request, contacted Big Minh last night to probe the situation with him. He reports that Big Minh was confused yesterday as to what was taking place. He gave Jones no impression of having sent word to see you and me. As far as he was concerned, the occasion was simply a game of tennis. He indicated that he has no message to communicate to me now but would be very glad to discuss the military situation at any time. He sees no problem in my calling on him or in his coming to see me." (National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-186-69)

163. Letter From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) to President Diem

Saigon, October 1, 1963.

Source: National Defense university, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Top secret. A typewritten note on the source text reads: "Following Letter from General Taylor to President Diem being delivered 2 October with approval of secretary McNamara and concurrence of Ambassador Lodge."

164. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) to the Acting Secretary of State

Washington, October 1, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, Organizations and Alignments. Secret. Drafted by Mendenhall with the concurrences of Woodruff Wallner, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, and William B. Buffum, Deputy Director of the Office of United Nations Political Affairs. Sent through Harriman.

165. Telegram From the Department of State to the Mission at the United Nations

Washington, October 1, 1963—8:37 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central files, SOC 14-1 S VIET-US. Secret; Priority. Drafted by Kattenburg and Hilsman and signed by Ball. Also sent to Saigon and repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD.

166. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs (Cleveland) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, October 2, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 64 D 54, POL 7 Visits Meetings (to U.S.). Confidential. Drafted by Cleveland on October 2. Copies were sent to Ball, Harriman, Stevenson, and Rusk.

167. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) and the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President

Washington, October 2, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Top Secret. Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, pp. 554-573.

168. Memorandum of Conversation

New York, October 2, 1963, 3 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by Peter S. Thacher of the Political Affairs Section of the Mission. The meeting took place at USUN.

169. Summary Record of the 519th Meeting of the National Security Council

Washington, October 2, 1963, 6 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, NSC Meeting No. 519. Top Secret. This meeting took place in the Cabinet Room of the White House and lasted until 6:30 p.m., according to the President's Log. (Ibid.)

170. Record of Action No. 2472, Taken at the 519th Meeting of the National Security Council

Washington, October 2, 1963.

Source: Department of State, S/S-NSC Files: Lot 70 D 265, NSC Meetings. Secret.

171. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency

Saigon, October 3, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is the copy sent by the CIA to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. The telegram was also sent exclusive to the White House for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. It was received at the Department of State at 2:06 p.m. on October 3 and passed to USUN for Rusk eyes only.

172. Memorandum of Meeting

Washington, October 3, 1963, 6 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Meetings and Memoranda, vol. 11, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. Also published in Declassified Documents, 1982, 510C. The source text indicates the President did not attend the meeting, which was held in the White House Situation Room.

173. Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' Special Assistant (Sullivan) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, October 3, 1963.

Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Vietnam—Policy. Secret.

174. Memorandum for the Record of a Meeting of the Executive Committee

Washington, October 4, 1963, 4 p.m.

Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-233-69. Top Secret; Sensitive. Drafted by Krulak who did not provide a list of participants. The meeting was held at the White House. A record of the discussion by Bromley Smith lists the following participants: "Secretary McNamara, Secretary Dillon, Attorney General, Under Secretary Harriman, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric (later), Administrator Bell, Director McCone, Acting Director Wilson, General Krulak, Assistant Secretary Hilsman, Deputy Assistant Secretary William Bundy, Mr. Janow (AID), Mr. Koren (Hilsman's office), Mr. McGeorge Bundy, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Bromley Smith." (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda, Meetings on Vietnam)

175. Annex to the Draft Report Prepared for the Executive Committee of the National Security Council

Washington, October 4, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam. Top Secret. There is no drafting information on the source text, but an earlier draft of this annex, October 3, had William Bundy as the drafter. (Ibid.) This annex was attached without modification to the October 5 draft of the report (see footnote 3, Document 174) but was not sent as part of Document 181.

176. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, October 4, 1963—9:03 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Confidential; Priority. Drafted and initialed by Ball.

177. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency

Saigon, October 5, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Har-Van files, Coup South Vietnam. Secret. Also printed in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, vol. II, pp. 767-768. There is no time of transmission on the source text.

178. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, October 5, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, Coup South Vietnam. Top Secret. Sent via CIA channels as telegram IN 34026. A note on the source text indicates that copies were sent to McGeorge Bundy, Hilsman, and Krulak. Also printed in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, vol. 11, p. 768. No transmission time is given on the source text.

179. Memorandum for the Files of a Conference With the President

Washington, October 5, 1963—9:30 a.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Forrestal on October 7. The meeting was held in the White House. Forrestal sent this memorandum to Bromley Smith under cover of a memorandum of October 8 which reads in part as follows: "I also attach a draft NSAM together with a memorandum to Secretary McNamara. If the NSAM looks okay to you, will you shoot it off to McNamara for his clearance? "Should copies of the NSAM go to anybody else (Secretary Dillon, the Attorney General, the Vice President)? I should think perhaps not." Smith indicated on the memorandum that he had obtained McNamara's clearance and agreed with Forrestal that no copies should be sent to any one else. The draft NSAM referred to comprised a draft report to the NSC, October 4 (see footnote 3, Document 174), an annex to the report

(Document 175), and a draft of telegram 534 to Saigon (Document 181), which was essentially the draft report to the NSC in cable form.

[180. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, October 5, 1963—5:38 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIEI Top Secret; Immediate. The text of this message was sent to the Department of State from the White House for transmission.

[181. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, October 5, 1963—5:39 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate Prepared by Hilsman with clearances of Harriman and Bundy. Cleared in draft with Rusk and McNamara. Regarding the drafting of this cable, see Document 179. Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD exclusive for Felt.

[182. Telegram From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs \(Bundy\) to the Ambassador in Vietnam \(Lodge\)](#)

Washington, October 5, 1963.

Source: United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, p. 574. Top Secret. Sent via CIA channels.

[183. Memorandum by the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' Special Assistant \(Sullivan\)](#)

Washington, undated.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret. A note on the source text indicates that this memorandum was taken from the President's weekend reading of October 6, and that its approximate date was October 5. Sullivan was a member of the Taylor-McNamara Mission to Vietnam, September 24-October 1, and he labeled this a "Mission Memorandum."

[184. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, October 6, 1963, 7 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate Eyes Only. Received at 7:59 a.m. and passed to the White House at 8:17 a.m.

[185. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, October 6, 1963, 8 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. Received at 9:15 a.m. and passed to the White House at 9:45 a.m.

[186. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, October 7, 1963, 7 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. Received at 9:17 a.m. and passed to the Department of Defense exclusive for McNamara and to the White House at 10:55 a.m.

[187. Memorandum of White House Staff Meeting](#)

Washington, October 7, 1963, 8 a.m.

Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by W.Y White.

188. Memorandum of Conversation

Washington, October 7, 1963—10:30 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Secretary's Memoranda of Conversation: Lot 65 D 330, Oct. 1963. Secret. Drafted by Johannes Imhof. The meeting was held at the Department of Stat.

189. Memorandum of a Conversation

Washington, October 7, 1963—4:30 p.m.

Source: Department of State, President's Memoranda of Conversations: Lot 66 D 149. Secret. Drafted by Tyler and approved by Bundy and Ball. The meeting was held at the White House.

190. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations (Dutton) to the Secretary of State

Washington, October 8, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Secretary's Staff Meetings: Lot 66 D 147, FRC Session with McNamara, 10/8/63.

191. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, October 9, 1963, 11 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, SOC 14-1 S VIET. Secret; Limit Distribution. Received at 12:53 a.m. and passed to the White House at 1:20 a.m.

[192. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency to the Ambassador in Vietnam \(Lodge\)](#)

Washington, October 9, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, Coup South Vietnam. Top Secret. Also printed in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, vol. 11, p. 769, where it is incorrectly dated October 6.

[193. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, October 10, 1963, 5 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, PER-LODGE, HENRY CABOT. Secret; Limit Distribution; Eyes Only. Received at 6:15 a.m. and passed to the White House at 7:07 a.m.

[194. National Security Action Memorandum No. 263](#)

Washington, October 11, 1963.

Source: Department of State, S/S-NSC Files: Lot 72 D 316, NSAMs. Top Secret; Eyes Only. The Director of Central Intelligence and the Administrator of AID also received copies. Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, p. 578.

[195. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, October 14, 1963—9:43 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Top Secret; Priority. The text of this message was sent from Bundy at the White House to the Department of State.

196. Central Intelligence Agency Information Report

Washington, October 14, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, CIA Cables. Confidential; Routine; No Foreign Dissem/No Dissem Abroad/Background Use Only/Controlled Dissem. The source text indicates this information was acquired in Saigon on and before October 12; as commentary, it is unappraised. A covering note from Forrestal to McGeorge Bundy, October 16, suggests that the President should read it. A marginal note in Bundy's hand indicates that the President saw it.

197. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, October 16, 1963, 7 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Received at 9:28 a.m. and passed to the White House at 10:25 a.m. and to the CIA and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

198. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, October 18, 1963, 4 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S Viet. Secret; Priority. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 6:44 a.m. and passed to the White House, CIA, and Office of the Secretary of Defense.

199. Letter From the Acting Director of the United States Information Agency_(Wilson) to the Counselor for Public Affairs

at the Embassy in Vietnam (Mecklin)

Washington, October 18, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret; Eyes Only.

200. Memorandum From the Special Assistant in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (Neubert) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, October 18, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam. Secret.

201. Memorandum From the Director of the Vietnam Working Group (Kattenburg) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, October 18, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, Honolulu Conf Nov 20 '63. Secret. A note on the source text reads: "Action was to be by leak to press."

202. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, October 19, 1963, 1 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Top Secret. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 6:56 a.m. and passed to the White House, CIA, and Office of the Secretary of Defense.

203. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, October 19, 1963, 2 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, FT 1 S VIET Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 4:24 a.m. and passed to the White House at 4:45 a.m.

204. Memorandum From Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)

Washington, October 21, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous.

205. Editorial Note

206. Telegram From the Army Attache in Vietnam (Jones) to the Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Department of the Army

Saigon, October 22, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, Coup South Vietnam. Secret; Noform.

207. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, October 23, 1963, 5 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Top Secret; Eyes Only. Received at 10:44 a.m. and passed to the White House at 12:55

p.m.

208. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, October 23, 1963, 7 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET Top Secret; Priority; Eyes Only. Received at 8:21 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to Defense, CIA, and the White House.

73. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 7, 1963—12:43 p.m.

353. For Lodge and Country Team. Deptel 349.² Herewith set of questions to which answers desired here soonest. Request all assets mission participate as required with Krulak and Mendenhall in providing coordinated answers, reflecting your concerted judgment.

General Krulak is carrying list of questions prepared by Defense, bearing generally on attitudes in Viet-Nam armed forces toward regime and progress of war as result present crisis. In providing answers to questions below you should be guided by fact our main concern here is determine extent to which current political crisis has already eroded, or is likely erode, will and determination of upper, middle and lower echelon Vietnamese bureaucracy and military to wage successful fight against VIET Cong.

- A. Following is list of groups whose attitudes we seek determine. Endeavor so far as possible distinguish target groups and give relevant answers for each:
1. Top Echelons GVN Govt.
 2. Civilian Bureaucracy Saigon.
 3. Province and District Bureaucracy.
 4. Top level GVN military.
 5. Division commanders; officers and noncoms in troop and combat units.
 6. Police and Security officials.
 7. Urban professionals, intellectuals, students.
 8. Labor.
 9. Organized religious groups including Buddhists.
- B. Following are broad categories of questions which represent optimum. Realize however that in time available impossible cover all questions for each target group. These should therefore be considered guidelines.
1. Attitudes toward top GVN leadership:
 - a) To what extent has confidence in Diem and Nhu been impaired by recent events?
 - b) How is Diem regarded? Has he escaped most of opprobrium for recent actions? How is Nhu regarded? Is he acceptable as

dominant force? Are Diem and Nhu regarded predominantly as separate or as Siamese twins?

- c) What are attitudes toward Vice President? Key cabinet ministers? Other top leaders?
- d) To what extent are GVN handling of Buddhist crisis and present policies martial law and suppression regarded as excessively oppressive?
- e) Has discontent crystallized into disaffection? If so, how determined and militant is disaffection? At what levels in bureaucracy and military is disaffection most serious and explosive? How serious is impact on efficiency and morale?
- f) Does each target group have feeling of stake and participation in govt policies and programs?
- g) Do target groups believe situation will now stabilize under Diem-Nhu leadership or that significant political challenge by opposition to regime will occur?
- h) What if any alternative political leadership is mentioned by groups?

2.

Attitudes toward top military leadership.

How are generals regarded now? Are their actions viewed as having supported regime, and how is their failure move against regime appraised? Are generals viewed as strong, weak, or irrelevant factor in political situation?

3. Attitudes toward VC and war:

- a) To what extent have developments last few weeks significantly affected war effort against VC?
- b) Is feeling now that war can be continued with reasonable prospect of success? Will Diem and Nhu be able to regain momentum and progress in the war?
- c) How has govt handling of Buddhist crisis affected attitudes toward VC? Is VC now increasingly regarded as only opposition to regime which has chance of success?
- d) Is there more thinking now than before about rapprochement with Hanoi?

4. Attitudes toward external forces:

- a) What are current attitudes in target groups toward US, US policies and US advisors?
- b) Toward France and General De Gaulle's viewpoint?

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Kattenburg, cleared with Sarris in draft, and approved by Hilsman. Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD.

² Document 71.

74. Telegram From the White House to the President, at Squaw Island, Massachussets¹

Washington, September 7, 1963—10:43 p.m.

CAP 63496. Cable to Lodge follows; per Hilsman, Rusk requests you clear this with the President for release.

To Saigon, eyes only for Lodge:

Review of Deptels raises possibility we have not been sufficiently precise in telling you our thoughts about the possible removal of brother Nhu.

From the viewpoint of Vietnamese solidarity and world and domestic US opinion, it is important that Nhu not have a key role.

What we are not yet clear about is whether the step of insisting that he depart the country for an extended period would be necessary to restore the Vietnamese peoples' confidence in their government so as to permit a victory in the war. It is on this point that we hope the reassessment you are now engaged in will shed some light. End of message.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret; Priority; Eyes Only. Sent from the White House Situation Room to the President for delivery on the morning of September 8. The President did not clear the cable to Lodge; a note on the source text reads, "not sent to Saigon."

75. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 9, 1963, 5 p.m.

450. CINCPAC for POLAD. Reference: Deptel 354.² Embassy believes would be preferable omit Tri Quang from discussion on release of bonzes. His strong belief in importance of removing Ngo family (with possible exception Diem) from power render him enemy of regime, which will most probably feel action against him (at least long term detention) necessary for own security. Up to present GVN has not released other top level Buddhist leaders, and Quang may well be regarded by Ngo family as most dangerous of all. As reftel suggests, believe best course under current conditions would be for Quang to leave country. He himself has requested this (Embtel 399).³ As to feasibility, GVN may well believe that oppositionists out of country do not pose significant threat, although in case of Quang, his probable ability to aid in mobilization of international Buddhist opinion against GVN would be factor working against their willingness see him leave.

As to Quang's leadership potential, Embassy believes this to be considerable. At time of May 8 incident in Hue, Quang demonstrated his complete mastery of crowds on several occasions. In addition to this ability to speak effectively to the public he has impressed Embassy officers by the acuteness of his intelligence and his political awareness. He is in addition self-assured to point of conceit. While in Embassy he has made systematic effort to build himself in our eyes as well as to attempt persuade us to pursue policy conducive to his ends. While his goal has been replacement of key members of Ngo family he has maintained to date that he had not considered in detail how Buddhist tactics (popular agitation) would lead to result desired or whether forces Buddhists setting in motion might not result in overall change for worse. In response to questioning he has limited himself to general statement that in his view VC could not gain control of situation in event of a change and that removal members Ngo family could only be considered change for better. (We are continuing to probe further on this subject.)

Although he has disclaimed idea of himself assuming political leadership, believe it be quite possible that he has in fact entertained idea, but that he has given little or no systematic thought to problems which would be

entailed. In short, as oppositionist, Quang possesses very considerable leadership powers; as potential member of government, he has given no basis for an evaluation of his ability, although his basic intelligence, courage, force of personality and political awareness would argue that his leadership potential could be utilized in fields other than religion.

Should of course be borne in mind that both Quang's physical presence in Embassy and his awareness of US importance as factor in situation lead him to concentrate his efforts on attempt to influence our policy. Therefore possible that many of his statements to us (e.g., anti-Communism, anti-neutralism) may reflect his tactical judgments rather than deeply held convictions.⁴

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, SOC 14-1 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Received at 5:54 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House.

² In telegram 354 to Saigon, September 5, the Department of State informed the Embassy that it should not respond in writing to the Government of Vietnam's request for release of the three Buddhist monks who had received sanctuary in the Embassy. If asked by Diem about release, Lodge should respond that before the United States would consider releasing them it had to be satisfied that South Vietnam was taking positive steps to assure religious tolerance and redress specific Buddhist grievances. The Department also asked if it would not be preferable in the Embassy's view to exclude Tri Quang from the discussions and to arrange for him to leave South Vietnam. (*Ibid.*)

³ Telegram 399, September 2, contained the text of a letter from Tri Quang to Lodge, dated September 1. (*Ibid.*)

⁴

The Department agreed that Tri Quang should be left out of discussions with the Government of Vietnam and conceded that getting him out of the country would be best. The problem was how to do it and where to send him. (Telegram 365 to Saigon, September 9; *ibid.*)

On September 17 the Embassy reported it had a number of plans for removing Tri Quang, none of which were worth risking at that time. The better course, in the Embassy's view, was to continue to hold Tri

Quang. If a new Vietnamese Government emerged he might play a role in it; if the Diem government continued, then the United States would have to evacuate him without fanfare. (Telegram 531 from Saigon, September 17; *ibid.*)

76. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 9, 1963, noon.

447. CINCPAC/POLAD exclusive for Admiral Felt. Eyes only for Secretary. Following is substance conversation between Rufus Phillips and Thuan late evening September 7:

1. Thuan opened the conversation by saying that he felt completely useless now. Nhu says that he has been bought by the Americans, and would certainly kill him if he tried to resign. Nevertheless, he said, he would like to resign, and would like to know if the Americans could arrange to get him out of the country if he decided to quit. He was told that the matter would be looked into.
2. According to Thuan, Nhu is now in effective control of the country. He is the only one whom the President trusts, and, in effect, the President has mentally abdicated in his favor. Ordinarily at meetings, Nhu speaks for the President, and the President gives assent; on other occasions the President simply repeats what Nhu has told him to say.
3. Both Nhu and the President are completely unrealistic about the progress of the war, in Thuan's opinion. Each has asked Thuan how long the country could last without US assistance. His reply, [he] said, was that it might last for six months without other than military aid; but that a cut-off in military aid would precipitate an almost immediate collapse.
4. In this connection, Thuan recalled that in a recent conversation with Colonel Lac (Permanent Commissioner, Interministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets), the latter, in response to a question, said that in his opinion the present administration, if it continued in office, would lose the war in 1965. Lac went on to say that in his opinion, the GVN is losing the war in the Delta now. Thuan added that he was in full accord with Lac on the latter point.
5. Thuan said that several Generals had been in contact with him, seeking his views on a coup d'etat. (He would not identify the Generals.) He had refused to be drawn, not feeling sure that they were not acting as agents provocateurs. Thuan went on to say that in his opinion, General Dinh could definitely be "had", for an appropriate price in liquor, women, and cash.

6. Asked for his opinion about what the Americans should do, Thuan said he believed that they should cut off aid, as that would undoubtedly cause everyone to realize that they meant business. He stressed that personal loyalty to the President on the part of many of the officers was one of the major inhibiting factors—but that all were looking to the Americans for leadership—and that most could be expected to follow the Americans' lead.
7. Thuan also discussed the last meeting of the Interministerial Committee at which General Cao of IV Corps presented a briefing. Cao, he said, stressed that operations in the Delta area are improving, and that the troops are becoming more mobile there. He made three interesting points:
 - a. The Civil Guard and SDC should not be given modern weapons such as carbines.
 - b. Factories for making "home-made" weapons should be established to arm the CG and SDC, so that the VC could not arm themselves from them; and
 - c. The only thing that he needs to win in the Delta is more troops.
8. According to Thuan, Nhu proceeded to interpellate Cao, starting by asking how many static defense posts there now are in the Delta. "2301, sir," said Cao. "Isn't that more than there were six months ago?" "Yes, sir," said Cao. "How can you then say that the troops are more mobile now?" said Nhu. There was no answer. Nhu went on to ask how the CG and SDC could be expected to be effective with "home-made" weapons, if they were unable to defend themselves with modern weapons? Receiving no answer, he then asked if more and better Strategic Hamlets were being built, as Cao said, and therefore presumably releasing more troops from static defense duties, why force levels were steadily rising, and even more troops being sought by Cao. Again, there was no answer.
9. Asked directly if he believed Nhu was on the verge of taking overt action to eliminate Ministers or Americans, or to establish a rapprochement with the DRV, Thuan said that he did not think there was any serious danger at this time, since Nhu is so well satisfied with the way things are going. He added, however, that Nhu was perfectly capable of any or all of these measures, and might well resort to them if he felt pressed. In his view, the Americans would do well to prepare for these contingencies.
10. As a closing comment, Thuan said that virtually all work has stopped in the Ministries in Saigon. He cited as an example, a recent visit by the Minister of National Economy, carrying a detective novel. Queried by Thuan, the Minister said, in substance: "all we, or anybody else, do in the office is to read these. We are waiting."

Phillips' comment: Thuan was very obviously deeply disturbed by the present situation, convinced that it can only be resolved by American leadership, and equally convinced that he is helpless to do anything. This last is almost certainly correct.

Embassy comment: Thuan went over much same ground in conversation with Trueheart Sept. 8. Following are additional points from that conversation:

Re para 6, Thuan said he had little confidence in the Generals, i.e. in their will and ability to take action. Only General mentioned by name was Khiem, Chief of Staff. Thuan thought that Khiem was loyal to President but, on other hand, he might be working with Colonel Thao (see CAS 0483).²

Thuan indicated to Trueheart considerable concern for his personal safety, saying that he took seriously being on Tran Van Khiem's assassination list. He plainly believes that Khiem has a real organization and mentioned that Colonel Phuoc, Chief of Vinh Long Province, is a part of it. Thuan is especially concerned that Italian Ambassador D'Orlandi has been touting him for PriMinister. "Does he want to get me assassinated?"

Thuan said that Nhu is definitely trying to destroy him. He is telling Diem that Thuan is American agent, and Thuan senses that Diem's attitude toward him has changed. Nhu is also having Special Forces pass out leaflets claiming that Thuan and Minister of Justice Luong have received US payments of several hundred thousand dollars. Thuan said he had confronted Diem with one of these leaflets.

Thuan said that Nhu was systematically passing out word that he, Nhu, has full backing of Ambassador Lodge. Thuan himself appeared to believe this and said that Nhu had told him personally that Lodge wanted him to be his political advisor. (See Embtel 434.)³ Trueheart disabused him.

Overall, Trueheart received clear impression that Thuan has given up hope and is thinking only of his personal safety and that of his family.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Received at 6:41 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House at 7:15 a.m.

² Document 22.

³ Document 72.

77. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 9, 1963, 11 p.m.

455. Eyes only for Secretary. CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Admiral Felt. Here is a report of an hour and fifty minute conference with Diem.

1. I read him paraphrase of Deptel 331² describing the situation in the United Nations, saying that I was glad to hear that Madame Nhu was not going to present the Vietnamese case. He said he could not understand where this report had originated. She was not going to present the Vietnamese case, but she did reserve the right to conduct press conference in New York to defend herself against all the outrageous things which had been said against her.
2. I then read paraphrase Deptel 335³ on the situation in the Senate and gave him copy of the unclassified telegram describing the views of Senators Church and Lausche.⁴
3. After finishing this description of conditions in the UN and in Congress, I said it was obvious that public opinion could not condone the idea that American loss of lives and American aid were being expended for the repression of human rights. The President had expressed doubts that victory was possible without a change of policies and it was my personal view that without some change of policy the suspension of aid would become a very real possibility.
4. I said I had noted that Mr. Nhu desired a Congressional investigation. It was my observation that whenever a foreigner tried to put himself between the President and Congress he risked to lose a great deal. In fact I had never seen a case in which this procedure had done other than injure the foreigner. He denied that Mr. Nhu was asking for a Congressional investigation. Mr. Nhu had merely said that it was up to Congress to decide whether to have one or not.
5. I then said that it was vital to get a change of personnel and a change of policies. My first advice to him was that Mr. Nhu should go away, not returning at least until end of December—after the appropriations had been voted. He looked at me aghast and said “why it would be out of the question for him to go away when he could do so much for the Strategic Hamlets.” When I said many regarded him as the head of the Secret Police and the director of the Aug 20 raids, Diem said: “He has been very unjustly accused. He was not the one

who organized the raid of Aug 20. He was always the influence in favor of a flexible solution of the problem. He is the only man in the Cabinet who is neither a technician nor a lawyer nor a bureaucrat. If American opinion is in the state that you describe then it is up to you, Ambassador Lodge, to disintoxicate American opinion;" the French word he used is: "desintoxiquer".

6. I said I recognized that it was part of my job to try to straighten American opinion and that I would be only too glad to do so if he would give me something with which to work.
7. I then brought up the matter of eliminating censorship of the press. This started him off on a long harangue about the Buddhist problem, about how they were in a state of evolution with the young men in their late thirties and early forties of which he mentioned particularly Tri Quang and the other fellow Tran Van Nhan. They could write and speak very well, but now the whole thing had been settled by the understanding which he had reached with the regular leaders of the Buddhist movement. When I said that these were considered to be puppets he said how could anybody say that, they were the people who were in the job and were not put there by me.
8. Finally I got him back to the question of censorship. He said as far as the Vietnamese press was concerned the journalists did their own censorship and there was no censorship in advance, that whenever the government saw something that was bad for the morale of the Army or totally untrue then they would take it out. As far as the foreign press was concerned there was practically no censorship at all, the foreigners were using planes and using mail and that it was actually impossible to control.
9. Whenever I tried to get back either to the departure of Nhu or the lifting of the censorship of the press he would start off on something else. One of his topics was the fact that he had asked the US Govt for its agreement on their new Amb a week ago and got no answer. It was obviously extremely annoying to him that Tran Van Chnong and Mrs. Chnong were still in the Vietnamese Emb in Wash. FYI: Can the Dept tell me something about this?
10. He said that his representative proposed to show in New York that the pagodas had been turned into bordellos, that they had found a great deal of female underwear, love letters and obscene photographs. That the virgins were being despoiled there. They knew of one priest who had despoiled 13 virgins. This apparently was part of the "crisis of growth" of the Buddhist movement.
11. He said that out of 4700 pagodas in the country only between 20 and 30 had been searched and the only one that had been damaged was the Xa Loi Pagoda which had to be touched because "they were using

the tower in order to drop things on peoples heads.” Only 70 prisoners remained.

12. I then once again got back to the need for new policies and new people in the GVN in order to change the thinking in the Western world, notably in Wash. Whereupon he started off on the situation in Hue. He said that in particular the USIS was extremely offensive, that they were printing and distributing tracts to students telling the students to demonstrate on behalf of the Buddhists and to conduct strikes; that they were abusing diplomatic immunity in that they were using houses which possessed diplomatic immunity to print and distribute these tracts. That Asher, Chief of the USIS at Hue, had incited two professors to tell the most barefaced lies. He hoped something could be done about the USIS.
13. Speaking of the recent student strikes he said that this was a Communist plot, that the Communists had abandoned the idea of taking over the countryside and then leaving the cities for dessert. Because of the success of the Strategic Hamlet Program they were going after the cities first.
14. I then read from the Dept's 355⁴ which said that the Associated Press quoted Bishop Thuc as saying that the US has spent \$20 million trying to replace Diem. Diem said Thuc shouldn't have said this but he wondered whether it was true. “I will speak to him about it.”
15. I then read him the passage from the Dept's 355 in which Reuters quotes Bishop Thuc as saying the Buddhist monks were not suicides but murder cases and were killed with a hammer. He had no comment at all.
16. When I got up to go he said he had had a meeting of Generals recently who told him the war was going very well in spite of all the trouble they had had. As I parted he said he thanked me for coming in and said he would carefully consider all the things that I had said. I reiterated that I hoped very much that there would be changes in personnel and in policy in order to make continued support of the war possible.
17. Although I stated what I intended to state many times, I did not feel he was really deeply interested. He seemed totally absorbed with his own problems here and was justifying himself and attacking his enemies. Perhaps this is all part of his medieval view of life. He is constantly preoccupied with fighting back, which is a commendable trait in many ways but makes it hard to get a new idea across to him.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, SOC 14-1 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Received at 2:38 p.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House and CIA at 4:30 p.m.

² See footnote 5, Document 72.

³ Document 63.

⁴ In telegram 341 to Saigon, September 6—1:54 p.m., the Department informed the Embassy that Senator Lausche stated on the Senate floor that he agreed with President Kennedy's view "that there must be a change of policy by the South Vietnamese Government and possibly a change in personnel." Senator Church's remarks from the CBS News report of September 8 to the effect that "he may move to cut off all foreign aid to South Vietnam unless the Diem government begins drastic reform," were also quoted in the telegram. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US)

⁴ Dated September 7, not printed. (Department of State, Central Files, SOC 14-1 S VIET)

78. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of the State¹

Saigon, September 9, 1963, 8 p.m.

453. CINCPAC for POLAD. For Hilsman from Mendenhall. This is interim report based on observations and discussions both in Saigon and provinces. Have spent bulk of time in central coastal provinces where Buddhist problem is most acute.

1.

I have been struck by fear which pervades Saigon, Hue, and Da Nang. These cities have been living under reign of terror which continues. I have just been told by Dean of Law School Vu Quoc Thuc that again today hundreds of students were arrested.

These are also cities of hate directed mainly at Nhus but President Diem himself is increasingly identified with Nhus as sharing responsibility. Most families of government officials (civilian and military) in cities have felt government's oppressive hands on their children, with results in attitude that can be expected. Growing number of students themselves are talking of Viet Cong being preferred alternative to existing government (I have been told this in both Saigon and Hue).

American contacts, both official and social, with Vietnamese have been severely curtailed in cities since August 20 because of Vietnamese fear to be seen with Americans. I have personally experienced furtiveness which appears necessary to talk with Vietnamese in current police state atmosphere.

2.

In visits to Hue and Da Nang I found following re four northern provinces of Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam and Quang Tin based on conversations with Consul, MAAG, USOM, USIS, [less than 1 line not declassified] officials:

Army presents mixed picture. Top commanders are loyal-not too surprisingly since dissidents tend promptly be replaced (like General

Nghiem who disapproved GVN Buddhist policy by General Tri who supports it).

Considerable disgruntlement exists below top level, but extent is not clear perhaps partly because of limitations under which MAAG officers operate with respect to political field. Seems clear, however, that discipline continues prevail under present circumstances.

In civilian bureaucracy province chiefs remain loyal—again not unexpectedly since they are shifted if any doubt arises (as in Thua Thien recently) or continue despite incompetence if loyal (as in Quang Tin). District chiefs to extent known by persons I contacted probably are loyal with one exception. Civil bureaucracies in Hue [and?] Da Nang riddled with dissatisfaction (as in Saigon).

Course of war appears be taking downturn in certain of these provinces. Quang Tin had worst month in August since last November. In Quang Nam several recent incidents seen [seem?] indicate that VC who were being pushed away from coastal areas now beginning push back in that direction. Not known whether popular dissatisfaction has been factor in these developments, but may be pertinent that in both Quang Nam and Thua Thien discontent over Buddhist issue extends to villages and in Hue it is now being reported that villagers say they may as well submit to VC as to GVN.

GVN “conciliatory” measures have no effect in changing attitudes. I am told that, despite release of some arrested, second rounds of arrests have occurred and some of those released are re-arrested by a second security service. Pagodas and schools are claimed officially to be open but in many cases are not. Perhaps noteworthy that Consul in Hue and [*less than 1 line not declassified*] Da Nang have seen only three bonzes in streets since August 20.

3. I also stopped in Nha Trang and talked with American military officers who indicated from their limited vantage point of staying out of civilian affairs that there appeared be no further Buddhist problem. I missed [*less than 1 line not declassified*] but have been informed in Saigon that he has reported people in that area very upset and held down only by fear of retaliation and atmosphere of terror.

Shall report more fully on return to Washington early morning September 10.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 2 S VIET. Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution. Received at 2:49 p.m. Repeated to CINCPAC.

79. Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, September 9, 1963.

MAC-

Hilsman says he and Harriman are sore as hell over "dirty pool" in Pentagon. Harriman says someone pulled out a cable from Harkins² in test ban session this morning and showed it to JFK; it says Harkins and Krulak think everything's wonderful in Vietnam. State never got this cable, and wants us to spring it.

Roger is much more taken with Saigon 447³ on Thuan's views, which State suggests makes it more urgent than ever that we put additional pressure on Viets. Roger urges JFK see this cable.

RWK

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret.

² Apparent reference to either MAC 1646 or MAC 1651, both September 9. These telegrams were preliminary reports by Krulak of his interviews with U.S. advisers on the state of the morale of the Vietnamese Army. Krulak's summary report on the Delta and IV Corps in MAC 1646 is representative of his preliminary conclusions in general:

"Visited Delta and Fourth Corps units. Talked to 31 officers, 4 enlisted U.S. advisors. Their general attitudes were uniform in the following areas: they are attentive to fighting the war, certain that steady progress is being made, convinced that present thrust will ultimately bring victory, assured that their units are worrying about the Viet Cong and not about politics or religion, generally unwilling to say categorically that war effort has slowed, but anxious to illustrate that the change has been small." (MAC 1646 from Krulak to Taylor, September 9; *ibid.*, Defense Cables) MAC 1651, which reported on Krulak's visit to I, II, and III

Corps, is also *ibid*. Krulak's report on his visit to Vietnam is [Document 82](#).

³ Document 76.

80. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, September 10, 1963.

IN 16397. 1. Herewith brief personal comments on recent developments [2 lines not declassified].

[1 paragraph (6 lines) not declassified]

2. Buddhist crisis. Believe GVN obviously had no conception of results which would flow from GVN restrictions prior 8 May. After 8 May, GVN underestimated seriousness of situation and moved grudgingly and too slowly. It now seems clear that Thich Tri Quang and a few leaders around him had far-reaching political objectives from outset, probably preceding 8 May. [1 sentence (2 lines) not declassified] At some intermediate period developments since 8 May, Tri Quang's domination of Intersect Committee in support of governmental overthrow became clear to GVN and foreign observers. GVN concluded that its policy of conciliation was failing and was being taken advantage of by Buddhist leadership to stimulate disorder, organize greater anti-GVN effort, and to arouse hostile domestic and international opinion, especially American public opinion. We must assume that GVN concluded its own survival was coming into serious question. It would almost necessarily identify GVN survival with victory in war against VC and with survival of nation. Against this background, violation of GVN assurances to U.S. representatives with respect to its conciliation policy toward Buddhists was probably almost predictable. Diem, of course, [garble] GVN engaged in necessary "surgical operation" which, in his view, did not equate with longer range departure from conciliation policy. Assume he will make effort to restore GVN international and domestic image with respect to Buddhists.

3. [less than 1 line not declassified] senior Vietnamese military leadership had in fact become seriously disturbed and had taken initiative of urging martial law on Diem to include removing bonzes from Xa Loi and other central pagodas back to home pagodas. From General Don's own comment that Diem asked this be done without hurting bonzes, we can assume that most parties to this affair, including military, realized that certain GVN effectives would have to enter pagodas to accomplish action

of removing bonzes. Major Tran Cuu Thien, Chief of Staff, SFHCVN, informed Colonel Morton on 9 Sept that SFHCVN briefed General Don on Vietnamese Special Forces planning for operation against pagodas prior to operation (our estimate Tran Thien is anti-Tung). General Do Cao Tr, i had been pursuing hard line course in I Corps area well prior to 21 August. General Nguyen Khanh and other officers had expressed disturbance at potential effect of Buddhist affair on military morale. We have little hard data on direct interaction between Nhu and general officers on specifics of action taken against pagodas. Conclusion is that general officers were themselves also involved in responsibility for 21 August.

4. Developments resulting from Mission effort to implement Deptel received here 25 Aug² exploded often-held assumption that certain general officers and other dissidents would move quickly if given green light and adequate assurances by appropriate U.S. officials. Looking back, *[less than 1 line not declassified]* general officers had done some thinking about assuming governmental power but were not unified, determined, or emotionally geared up to coup d'etat action. Do not believe general officers felt that strongly against Diem or that enough of them had deeply rooted animus against Nhu. They were simply not ready for action and would not embark on operation of this kind without major prospects of success. Assume also that they did not want to engage in all out fight in streets of capital city. At no time did they seem able to shift balance of forces sufficiently in their favor, even if one were to assume that they, in fact, made determined effort to do so. Yesterday, or day before, General Dinh is reported to have left for Dalat on short several-day vacation leaving his command with Chief of Staff Colonel Co who is responsive to General Khiem and Presidency. Despite absence of Dinh, general officers' most formidable antagonist in terms of forces he commands and his loyalty to Diem and Nhu, we would not expect general officers to act on this apparently favorable opportunity. Am inclined to feel general officers will seek evolutionary accommodation with Diem (if he permits them to do so) unless overall situation clearly deteriorates, there is breakdown of civil order or governmental machinery, or unless war effort begins to go backward seriously. This is not to say that other elements in military establishment might not attempt coup at some time in future.

5. Events since 21 Aug have caused concern and dissatisfaction within government and urban classes, and has increased dissidence among elements of military establishment. These effects may prove lasting among certain classes of population but it is extremely difficult to gauge

intensity or pervasiveness of such effects. [*1 sentence (2 lines) not declassified*] Our impression is that there are few points of no return in Asia and that there seems be large amount of stretch in Asian societies. Despite damages suffered since 8 May and 21 Aug, and despite difficulties and handicaps under which USG and GVN operating here, am inclined to believe we should be able resume successful prosecution of law [war?] in military and civil sectors. Although these liabilities and handicaps have probably increased and may increase further, these factors need not necessarily cancel out tentative conclusion suggested.

6. Aside from speculating on future, we should find next four to six months, perhaps even earlier, pointing way in practice as to what the prospects are. If situation goes forward reasonably well, so much the better. If it clearly deteriorate to [*sic*] both Vietnamese and we may find ourselves in better position to take corrective action.

[*Numbered paragraph 7 (10-1/2 lines) not declassified*]

¹ Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, South Vietnam Policy File, August 31 through September 15, 1963. Secret. There is no time of transmission on the source text.

² Telegram 243 to Saigon, [vol. III, p. 628](#) .

81. Memorandum From the Counselor for Public Affairs of the Embassy in Vietnam (Mecklin) to the Director of the United States Information Agency (Murrow)¹

En Route to Washington, September 10, 1963.

SUBJECT

A Policy for Viet-Nam

What follows is based on six assumptions, all of them controversial which will be discussed at length separately if desired. They are:

1. *A new Vietnamese government is essential.*

There is mounting evidence that the war cannot be won with the present regime, especially in view of the damage done to popular support during the Buddhist crisis. Even if the present regime can win, with continued U.S. aid, the point has become irrelevant. International and U.S. domestic public opinion probably would deny the U.S. the option of trying again. Such a try would also be an unacceptable humiliation of U.S. prestige after our present open effort to remove the Nhus from Viet-Nam.

2. *Real power must go to a new man.*

The focus of present indignation has been the Nhus. In fact, Nhu and his wife are as much symptoms of the GVN's shortcomings as they have been a cause. The true failure over the years to rally the Vietnamese people must be blamed on Diem himself. He has always controlled the power base, perhaps even now. Because of Diem's peculiar, rather neurotic relationship with Nhu, it is to be expected furthermore that Nhu's removal would simply force Diem deeper into suspicious isolation, making him more ineffective than ever. He should be retained only as a figurehead in the interest of stability.

3. *The odds are heavily against ousting the Ngo Dinh without considerable bloodshed.*

The regime over the years has built up powerful loyal forces which are now concentrated around Saigon. To prevent a prolonged deadlock, and thus an opportunity for the VC to make unacceptable gains, there is only

one sure recourse: an advance decision to introduce U.S. combat forces if necessary.

4. An unlimited U.S. commitment in Viet-Nam is justified.

This specifically means the use of U.S. combat forces if necessary, both to promote unseating of the regime and against the VC, as well as a willingness to accept an engagement comparable with Korea if the Communists choose to escalate. Shock waves from loss of Viet-Nam to communism would be disastrous throughout Southeast Asia, which is strategically vital to U.S. security. Conversely, this kind of strong and successful U.S. resort to force would strengthen resistance to communism throughout Asia and other underdeveloped areas. It would also be a significant defeat of the critical Chinese test in Viet-Nam of their ideology on war.

5. U.S. forces could be used against Asian Communist guerrillas and win. (And the stakes are so high that if unavoidable we must take the risk anyway.)

What might be called the French syndrome is wholly fallacious. The French lost in Indo-China because they behaved like colonialists, failed even to try to engage the people and never made an adequate military effort in any case. U.S. forces in Viet-Nam would be used contrarily to help the people, i.e. to carry out policies now in effect but often botched. Their presence and example would quickly inspire better leadership and initiative among the Vietnamese forces, as indeed was the experience in Korea.

6. The U.S. must accept the risks of covertly organizing a coup if necessary.

The available evidence indicates that there is a deep reluctance in the Vietnamese officer corps to accept the hazards of promoting a coup d'etat. It is therefore possible that action to topple the Ngo Dinh regime would not automatically follow even the most severe U.S. measures, e.g. suspension of aid, with resulting near chaos. It is also essential that the eventual successor regime be willing to cooperate with the U.S. including commitment of U.S. combat forces if the war can be won no other way.

In the writer's judgment, conditions in Viet-Nam have deteriorated so badly that the U.S. would be drawing to a three-card straight to gamble its interest there on anything short of an ultimate willingness to use

combat troops. Even if all-out pressures succeeded in unseating the Ngo Dinh, which is not an automatic certainty, at least not immediately, there is real danger that the successor regime would be equally or even more ineffective against the VC. There is also the danger that the Vietnamese military forces would fragment, dividing the country into rival camps, with disastrous consequences.

If we are not willing to resort to U.S. forces, it is wholly possible that efforts to unseat the Ngo Dinh would produce results that would be worse, from the U.S. viewpoint, than a negotiated "neutral" settlement. It is also possible that a prolonged deadlock would stimulate an irresistible shift in international and American public opinion in favor of such a settlement.

On the other hand, a decision now to use U.S. forces if necessary would give the whole U.S. effort psychological lift, producing confidence that we need not be frustrated indefinitely, giving us a sure hand that has been lacking in the past. When and if it became desirable to make this intention public, we would have a lever of immense value vis-a-vis the Vietnamese. Such a new sureness in our actions, with the clear implication that the U.S. "means business," would quickly get through to the Vietnamese and to third countries and thus conceivably itself remove the need to resort to force.

Perhaps it should also be noted that the present situation in Viet-Nam is confronting the U.S. with what was certainly an inevitable showdown on the thesis that Western industrial power somehow must always be frustrated by Communist guerrilla tactics applied against a weak, underdeveloped government that refused foreign advice and reforms of the very ills that the Communists live on. There are incipient insurrections of this sort all over the underdeveloped world and the outcome in Viet-Nam will have critical bearing on U.S. capability to prevent and/or suppress them.

In the writer's opinion, furthermore, there is a very real possibility that if and as Viet-Nam is conclusively being lost to the Communists, the U.S. will be forced to use force in any case as a last resort ² just as we did so unexpectedly in Korea. It would be vastly wiser-and more effective-to make this unpalatable decision now.

From this basis of strength, U.S. policy should seek establishment of a new government that would be as strong as possible but in any case would accept introduction of U.S. forces if necessary to defeat the VC.

Ideally the whole Ngo Dinh family should be removed, but the U.S. would accept retention of Diem in a figurehead role. It is essential that the Nhus leave the country permanently. (A specific time period, say six months, would not be sufficient since their influence and political apparatus would survive.)

Application of this policy should be on a step-by-step basis, thus hopefully achieving U.S. ends with minimum damage to the war effort against the VC. Recommended procedure:

1.

For the short term, continuation of the present heavy diplomatic pressure on the GVN. This would be designed to combine with outside events- congressional threats to cut aid, increased third country pressures in Saigon, UN censure, and perhaps even a world-wide trend toward consideration of DeGaulle's proposals-to force Diem and the Nhus to capitulate voluntarily and/or precipitate a spontaneous military coup.

It is suggested that such pressure be developed with an eye to giving Diem some kind of face-saving escape. Perhaps, for example, the U.S. should begin talking publicly about ousting the whole family, so that it eventually could compromise on departure of only the Nhus with the explanation that Diem had been "misled" or some such. With Orientals in general and notably with the Ngo Dinhs, capitulation is virtually impossible if they are painted into a corner.

2.

When this fails, as is probable, application of selected cuts in U.S. assistance, preferably through imposition of conditions on its use rather than outright surgery ³ which would have the same effect. The cuts should be applied to items of minimum importance to the war effort against the VC and maximum importance to the Nhus' political maneuvering, e.g. the Special Forces. The cuts should be widely publicized and in fact be chosen more for their psychological impact than expectation of serious damage to GVN operations.

If this did not quickly produce a spontaneous coup, the U.S. should begin covertly planning one. At this point dramatic deterioration of U.S.-GVN relations must be expected, with distinct physical danger to U.S. nationals and a virtual standstill in the advisory effort.

3.

Suspension of all aid to the GVN and if this also failed to unseat the regime, implementation as quickly as possible of the planned coup. If this also failed, or only partly succeeded, there should be plentiful excuses to bring in U.S. forces, e.g. to restore order, protect American citizens, etc. Such forces should be prepared for attack by loyal GVN troops, but it is more likely that they would simply act as power in being, making it possible now for the U.S. to have its way by simply presenting the Ngo Dinh with an ultimatum. Something similar to this happened when U.S. forces were introduced into Lebanon in 1958- with notably little resulting damage to the U.S. political position in the Middle East.

It is suggested that third country hostility toward the Ngo Dinh is already so considerable that this kind of reluctant, gradual but persistently determined application of U.S. power would similarly be accepted in Asia. And once U.S. forces had been introduced into Vietnam, it would be relatively simple on the invitation of the new regime to keep them on hand to help, if needed, in final destruction of the Viet Cong.

¹ Source. Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret. Murrow sent this memorandum to McGeorge Bundy under a cover: g memorandum, September 10. According to his account in *Mission in Torment*, pp. 206-207, Mecklin received instructions on September 7 to return to Washington with Mendenhall and Krulak with no real idea of what was expected of him. He wrote this memorandum on the plane. In Usito 66 to Saigon for Mecklin only, September 6, Murrow gave Mecklin the following guidelines:

"We particularly interested in changes if any in attitudes toward Diem Govt, Nhu and wife, and will to push war against Viet Cong to successful conclusion. In addition other contacts, you may wish draw on knowledgeable USIS local employees, particularly those attached to VN Information Service, in preparing assessment." (Washington National Records Center, RG 306, USIA/TOP Files: FRC 67 A 222, IAF-1963)

² Ellipsis in the source text.

³ Ellipsis in the source text.

82. Report by the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (Krulak)¹

En route to Washington, September 10, 1963.

VISIT TO VIETNAM

6-10 September 1963

The trip developed from a White House meeting on 6 September,² when it was concluded that among the factors required to support basic policy decisions is a knowledge of the effect of recent events upon the attitudes of the Vietnamese in general, and upon the war effort against the Viet Cong.

One means of acquiring this knowledge is through the day-to-day observations of U.S. military advisors. It was the purpose of the trip to obtain a first-hand sampling of the observations of U.S. military personnel who are in contact with the working Vietnamese military.

The horizons of the average U.S. advisor, except for those very near the top, are limited. Their attention, and thus their direct knowledge, are confined largely to the Vietnamese unit with whose fortunes they are identified. In terms of what they actually see, hear and interpret daily in this environment, their views have strong credibility. To the extent possible, this report derives from discussion oriented upon such matters of fact or of direct observation.

All Corps were visited. Substantive conversations were held with 87 members of the advisory system, from enlisted men of relatively low rank to senior officers. They included advisors to commanders and staff officers at levels from corps to company, and advisors to province chiefs. Most conversations were held in the individual's daily surroundings, either in the headquarters or in the field during operations.

Occasionally, in the interest of saving time, several advisors were assembled in a single place. The map³ facing page 1 shows the place visited.

There is no way of knowing how many Vietnamese officer views are reflected in these 87 interviews. Certainly, the number is great, and the sampling thus has a reasonably broad base.

The principal effort was addressed to procuring views of the advisors on:

The progress of the war; changes in the past few weeks; prospects for the future.

Relations with their Vietnamese counterparts; changes since the emergence of the crisis.

Attitudes of counterparts regarding the political problem, the Buddhist issue, the national leadership and pursuit of the war.

Attitudes of the Vietnamese people—observed or reported by counterparts—regarding the critical points mentioned above.

Complementary to the above, discussions were held with the Ambassador, General Harkins and his staff, as well as with 22 Vietnamese officers, whose views were sought on the critical issues wherever it was practicable to do so.

As a supplement to all the foregoing, key advisors were asked, through General Harkins, to put their views in writing. They will be found at Tab A.⁴

General conclusions reached were these

The shooting war is still going ahead at an impressive pace. It has been affected adversely by the political crisis, but the impact is not great.

There is a lot of war left to fight, particularly in the Delta, where the Viet Cong remain strong.

Vietnamese officers of all ranks are well aware of the Buddhist issue. Most have viewed it in detachment and have not permitted religious differences significantly to affect their internal military relationship.

Vietnamese military commanders, at the various echelons, are obedient and could be expected to execute any order they view as

lawful.

The U.S./Vietnamese military relationship has not been damaged by the political crisis, in any significant degree.

There is some dissatisfaction, among Vietnamese officers, with the national administration. It is focused far more on Ngo Dinh Nhu than on President Diem. Nhu's departure would be hailed, but few officers would extend their necks to bring it about.

Excluding the very serious political and military factors external to Vietnam, the Viet Cong war will be won if the current U.S. military and sociological programs are pursued, irrespective of the grave defects in the ruling regime.

Improvements in the quality of the Vietnamese Government are not going to be brought about by leverage applied through the military. They do not have much, and will probably not use what they have.

Field Visits

1. IV Corps.

Thirty-five U.S. military persons were interviewed, varying in rank from colonel to sergeant. They were cheerful, enthusiastic and readily prepared to discuss the key subjects. Obviously, they had been thinking about them.

a. *Specifics:*

- (1) 33 of the 35 asserted that their advisory relationships had not been changed in any way by the political crisis.
- (2) All 35 were enthusiastic about the progress of the war and were emphatic that their counterparts were laboring at the war and not at politics.
- (3) The Corps Advisor asserted that he was certain the Corps Commander had been ordered to intensify operations against the Viet Cong
- (4) 10 of the 35 had had limited discussion of political subjects with their counterpart; 3 had gone into the matter deeply.
- (5) 2 stated that their advisory relationship had degraded; one whose counterpart asserted that there are too many Americans in Vietnam,

and another who detected an unwillingness to pass on combat intelligence.

(6) One of the 35 reported hearing unfavorable comments regarding the Saigon Government—addressed to Ngo Dinh Nhu and his wife.

(7) None had discussed coup rumors with their counterparts.

(8) 4 of the 35 reported hearing apprehensive comments regarding possible suspension of U.S. aid.

b. In addition to the discussions with advisors, conversations were held with 9 Vietnamese officers, from major general to captain. It was not easy to break the ice with them on the sensitive issues. It was evident, however, that they were genuinely intent on their combatant activities, so much so as to give the impression that they could have little time left for plotting and politicking.

c. *Specifics:*

(1) General Cao, the IV Corps Commander, was willing to talk about martial law or Buddhists, but not politics. He stated that there was no martial law in his Corps area (this was confirmed separately by both divisions); that there had never been any curfew restrictions (likewise confirmed); that imposition of curfew would halt Saigon's fish supply.

(2) General Nhon, CG of the 21st Division, stated that his troops had no concern over the Buddhist question; that they were too busy fighting; Christians and Buddhists, side by side.

(3) The Corps G-3 (a major) stated that he is a Buddhist, and that his wife, a Catholic, complains that Madame Nhu talks too much.

(4) A major, Province Chief, stated that he (a Catholic) and his deputy (a Buddhist) took early steps to ensure tranquillity by conferring with bonzes and assuring them of support for free religious practice. He said that the big Buddhist issue is for President Diem and President Kennedy to solve.

d.

Combat Effort

Incident to the visit, a helicopter-borne attack against a suspected Viet Cong concentration was observed. It involved two Vietnamese battalions, a Civil Guard Company, a River Force section, and 29 helicopters and supporting tactical aircraft. It was professionally planned, well coordinated and efficiently executed.

Contact was actually made with the Viet Cong. In the face of it, troops were aggressive and well-led. When time limitations required that I leave the scene of action, I took away two strong impressions; we

could not have executed the complex operation any better, and any combat force that fights with the skill and energy which had been demonstrated is not spending much time in intrigue.

2. *III Corps.*

- a. The Corps Commander, General Dinh, is the martial law commander, and his Corps—officially or not—is the martial law corps. It is still fighting against the Viet Cong, but activity is less than it was a month ago. Much of its attention is aimed at security of the Capital. Operations are now beginning to increase in intensity, and there is indication that the unfavorable preoccupation is diminishing. As would be expected, attention to Saigon diminishes rapidly as the distance from the Capital increases.
- b. Advisor/counterpart relations have not degraded. There is a general reluctance to discuss politics—apparently deriving from an official Corps order. Such discussions as have been possible between advisors and their counterparts have suggested loyalty—or obedience—to the Government, concern over the need quickly to settle the Buddhist crisis and to defeat the Viet Cong. There is an undercurrent of antipathy for Mr. Nhu.
- c. *Specifics*

Fourteen officers and one enlisted advisor were interviewed. Reactions were as follows:

(1)

The Corps advisor, a two-year Vietnam veteran and a confidant of General Dinh, states that Dinh is firmly locked to the Palace, and has Diem's confidence; is surfeited with power and will keep his Corps—and Corps area—oriented toward the Government. He is generally respected by his officers. He stated that, of 10 Vietnamese officers who were willing to discuss politics with him, only one was deeply worried about the Buddhist problem, three were vocally anti-Nhu, expressing hope that the U.S. will exert pressure to diminish Nhu's power with Diem, whom they respect.

He stated that neither martial law nor curfew has had any significant impact on the civilians and military in the provinces, that civilians in the provinces are largely apathetic to the problem, and expressed confidence that offensive operations—impeded initially in the area near Saigon—would begin to accelerate.

- (2) Of the 13 other personnel interviewed, all agreed that the attention of the 5th Division (only 20 miles from Saigon) is directed mainly at the security of the city. Only three battalions of the division are now fighting the Viet Cong, although it is planned that the number will increase to six next week.
- (3) Ten of the 13 volunteered that operations elsewhere had not been impeded.
- (4) All but one were firm that their counterpart relations had not changed; that one asserted that he had detected a cooling attitude.
- (5) Two stated that their counterparts had advised them that political discussions with Americans were forbidden.
- (6) Four of the 13 stated that their counterparts had privately expressed favorable sentiments regarding Diem, unfavorable sentiments regarding Nhu and an intense desire to get forward with the war.

3. *II Corps.*

- a. This area exhibits its geographic remoteness from Saigon in terms of continued prosecution of the war, minimal impact of curfew (0100 to 0400 in Pleiku) and continued effective relationships between the Vietnamese military and their U.S. counterparts. Nineteen advisors were consulted. It was difficult to get them to talk about anything but the war, and the progress the Vietnamese are making.
- b. *Specifics:*
 - (1) The Corps Advisor reported that General Khanh, the Corps Commander, has spent much time ensuring that his military forces and his provincial authorities are fully apprised of the facts in the situation (the party line). He states that Khanh has issued orders for an intensification of all operations against the Viet Cong, aimed at driving them into the mountains, destroying their food and harrying their movements. The advisor reports that Khanh now spends more time in Saigon, is vocal in his praise of Diem; does not mention Nhu.
 - (2) All nineteen officers interrogated averred that their relations with their counterparts were excellent; two stated that they were closer than before the crisis.
 - (3) Two reported Vietnamese inquiries, following reading Newsweek, of the possibility of losing U.S. aid. One is quoted as saying, "You are our only true friends. We cannot win without you."
 - (4) Four advisors reported hearing younger officers speak adversely of Nhu; two were anxious, at the same time, to evince respect for Diem, one, in criticizing Nhu, stated that nothing could be done.

"This is our country. We have nowhere else to go and no money to go with."

- (5) One advisor had been lectured by his counterpart on the heavy-handed conduct of the Government in connection with the Buddhists—with whom he had no sympathy.
- (6) One advisor to a province chief stated that his counterpart was derisive of press claims of religious intolerance. The counterpart is a Montagnard (highlander) major, originally a Buddhist, converted Catholic, now a practicing Episcopalian who is actually building an Episcopal mission in Pleiku with Vietnamese engineers.
- (7) Seven advisors quoted their counterparts as stating that the Corps policy was to focus on fighting the Viet Cong, to get into the field more and to stay there longer.

4. *I Corps.*

- a. The general reaction derived from the military in this area is that, except for the fury generated in Hue by the original Buddhist troubles, it is business as usual, with the Viet Cong getting the business. The war, undeniably, is going well, and 92% of the rural population is now in strategic hamlets. Both officers and enlisted men have expressed discontent with the Buddhist problem, but their rancor seems more oriented upon Nhu and Madame Nhu than upon Diem or the Government. Twenty advisors were consulted. They represented a full cross section of the Corps area advisory contingent.
- b. *Specifics:*
 - (1) All twenty told the usual story of no change in their advisory relationships. Two stated that their counterparts were even closer to them because of their intense interest in reaming the significance of the world situation.
 - (2) The 1st Division advisor (Hue) stated that his counterpart (General Tri) had made a definite effort to accelerate operations in the past two weeks, and that this was being felt throughout the unit. He quoted his counterpart as saying that the local area could be expected to support the Diem Government, but that "nobody loves Nhu".
 - (3) The advisor to the 3d Regiment (Hue) quoted his counterpart as saying that the current crisis has meant little to the enlisted men or to the common people, that only the cities have been concerned, and that in those areas it is "more noise than anything else".
 - (4) One advisor reported a conversation with a Vietnamese officer (Buddhist) who was severely critical of the handling of the Buddhist matter in Hue.

- (5) Three of the 20 interrogated were highly critical either of Nhu, or of Nhu and his wife. One said they should be chased from the country. One said that Madame Nhu at the U.N. would be a tragedy for Vietnam.
- (6) None of the 20 had heard any comments regarding the question of withdrawing U.S. aid.

5. The Navy.

In a discussion with the senior advisor to the Vietnamese Navy, he disclosed the following as the expressed attitudes of Navy personnel:

- a. The commander of the Navy is loyal to Diem, as a person and as the head of the Government. He states that he is a military man and will support any government that is constitutionally established.
- b. Four key officers in the Navy are agreed that the imposition of martial law was necessary, but that the abrasive aspects which have accompanied it are the responsibility of Nhu, who ought to leave the country.
- b. Junior and mid-grade officers have made no significant statements on the subject. They, in fact, have been extremely busy with their Saigon security tasks and their routine sea and river activities.

6. The Air Force.

Conference with the senior advisor to the Air Force elicited the following:

- a. There are many Air Force officers who are overly attentive to politics, including the commander.
- b. On balance, their comments exhibit a loyalty to the Diem Government either out of patriotism (on the part of many, sincere younger officers who are U.S. trained), or of opportunism (on the part of the more senior officers who are French trained and who enjoy their position due to the current regime).
- c. The Air Force war effort has not degraded significantly since the crisis.
- d. Officers have expressed the view to the senior advisor that the Viet Cong war will be won—political vibrations notwithstanding—if the U.S. continues its aid.

7. The Marines.

The senior advisor to the Marine Brigade contributed the following:

- a. The entire brigade must be accounted wholly loyal to Diem. Colonel Khang, the commander, is intensely devoted to Diem and his officers will follow him without question.
- b. On the night of 30 August Khang, who is on intimate terms with his advisor, confided to him that there was probably going to be a coup that night, that he would lead the counter-coup and asked the advisor to care for his family affairs (8 children) in case he did not survive.
- c. The units of the brigade are either busy fighting or anxious to do so. Their attention is on the war.

8. The Senior Advisor.

The final interview was with General Harkins. He assessed the temper of the military forces in detail, and in much the same terms as were derived from the visits described in the preceding paragraphs.

He is convinced that the programs we have under way are sufficiently matured that it would be extremely difficult to put them in serious disarray.

He believes that Diem is seeking now to get the country back to what passes for normal, and is emphatic about the relatively minor effect the Buddhist repressions and the many ineptitudes of martial law have had on the country at large.

He believes that both sentiment and reality polarize strongly and properly against the Nhus; that the country could survive—and flourish—with them gone and Diem still there.

He is pursuing the military advisory role exactly as before, and is in frequent contact with the Ambassador, who obviously seeks and respects his counsel.

9. The Ambassador.

A final interview was held with the Ambassador just before departure, and following his long meeting of 9 September with President Diem. Since it has been reported separately,⁵ his debrief will not be repeated here, beyond recounting these peripheral comments:

- a. The Ambassador was impressed with the difficulty of getting Diem to contemplate the points he sought to make.

- b. He felt that the greatest impact was probably made by the discussion of the grave reaction which Diem is courting in the U.S. Congress.
- c. He was not sanguine concerning the success of his appeal that Nhu should depart, in the nation's interest, but is not prepared to acknowledge this is impossible to achieve.
- d. Just prior to the close of the discussion he observed that the Vietnam war is, in his view, the key to our Asian position and the controlling factor in the future of SEATO and our forward posture in the Pacific. He said that we cannot afford to lose, and that he is both resolute and confident that an effective formula can be found.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret.

² See Document 66.

³ Not printed.

⁴ Tab A was not attached to the source text. It is attached to a copy of the report in the National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Visit to Vietnam, September 7-10.

⁵ Apparent reference to Document 77.

83. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, September 10, 1963—10:30 a.m.

SUBJECT

Viet-Nam

PARTICIPANTS

The White House

The President
Mr. Bundy
Mr. Forrestal
Mr. Bromley Smith
Gen. Clifton

State Department

Secretary of State
Gov. Harriman
Mr. Hilsman
Amb. Nolting
Mr. Mendenhall
The Attorney General

Defense Department

Secretary McNamara
Mr. Gilpatric
Gen. Maxwell Taylor
Maj. Gen. Krulak

CIA

Mr. McCone

AID

Mr. Bell
Mr. Rufus Phillips
USIA: Mr. Murrow; Mr. John Mecklin

General Krulak briefed his written report, "Visit to Vietnam, 7-10 September 1963".² His general conclusions were as follows:

The shooting war is still going ahead at an impressive pace. It has been affected adversely by the political crisis, but the impact is not great.

There is a lot of war left to fight, particularly in the Delta, where the Viet Cong remain strong.

Vietnamese officers of all ranks are well aware of the Buddhist issue. Most have viewed it in detachment and have not permitted religious

differences significantly to affect their internal military relationship.

Vietnamese military commanders, at the various echelons, are obedient and could be expected to execute any order they view as lawful.

The U.S./Vietnamese military relationship has not been damaged by the political crisis, in any significant degree.

There is some dissatisfaction, among Vietnamese officers, with the national administration. It is focused far more on Ngo Dinh Nhu than on President Diem. Nhu's departure would be hailed, but few officers would extend their necks to bring it about.

Excluding the very serious political and military factors external to Vietnam, the Viet Cong war will be won if the current U.S. military and sociological programs are pursued, irrespective of the grave defects in the ruling regime.

Improvements in the quality of the Vietnamese Government are not going to be brought about by leverage applied through the military. They do not have much, and will probably not use what they have.

Mr. Mendenhall gave his report:³

Mr. Mendenhall stated he had found a virtual breakdown of the civil government in Saigon as well as a pervasive atmosphere of fear and hate arising from the police reign of terror and the arrests of students. The war against the Viet Cong has become secondary to the "war" against the regime. There is also the danger of the outbreak of a religious war between Buddhists and Communists [Catholics] unless the GVN ceases oppression of the Buddhists. Nhu is held responsible for all the repressive measures, but Diem is increasingly identified as sharing responsibility.

Mr. Mendenhall said he also found a similar atmosphere of fear and hate in Hue and Da Nang. In the northern coastal area the Viet Cong have made recent advances in Quang Tin and Quang Nam. It is not clear whether this is attributable to the Buddhists, but it is clear Buddhist agitation extended to the rural areas of Quang Nam and Thua Thien and that reports have come from Hue of villagers in Thua Thien opting for the VC. Students in Hue and Saigon are also talking of the VC as a preferred alternative to the GVN.

Mr. Mendenhall concluded that he was convinced by his visit that the war against the Viet Cong could not be won if Nhu remains in Vietnam.⁴

The President said, "The two of you did visit the same country, didn't you?"

General Krulak said that he thought the difference was that Mr. Mendenhall was reporting on the metropolitan and urban attitudes, while he, Krulak, was reporting on "national" attitudes.

Ambassador Nolting said that it might be true that there was paralysis in the civilian government as Mr. Mendenhall had reported, but there was also paralysis in 1961 and we came through at that time. Further, Mr. Mendenhall has held the opinion that we could not win the war with Diem for some time.⁵

Mac Bundy said that in 1961 we overcame the paralysis by strengthening the effort against the Viet Cong; now it was the government that was causing the fear and paralysis and it was a little difficult to strengthen a war against the government.

Rufus Phillips reported as follows:

He had many friends in Viet-Nam as a result of long years of working there. He knew Diem well, Nhu well and many of the officers and Generals well. He had an opportunity to know the mood of the rural areas since he was in charge of the strategic hamlet program. He said that Nhu has lost the confidence and respect of both the officers and the civil servants. They do not support the government with Nhu in it and would not support the government if they had an alternative. He said there was now a crisis of confidence in Viet-Nam not only between the Vietnamese people and their government but between the Vietnamese people and the Americans. As far-as the Vietnamese are concerned, we have supported Diem and they have no evidence that we have changed our views. Therefore, people are reluctant to stick their necks out since Nhu would move against any individual who did. Everyone is looking to the US and here we stand. The Vietnamese do not lack the guts to move against the government once they are sure of the US position.

The President recalled that we had made a number of public statements condemning the Vietnamese Government's actions but this has ignited

nothing.

Mr. Phillips said that we have criticized the government before. What the Vietnamese people are looking for is a concrete action illustrating the US position. He said that he would recommend a middle course of action—a series of moves in a psychological and political warfare campaign to isolate the Nhus and destroy the current impression that they were all-powerful. Most Vietnamese would like to see President Diem remain but they are unalterably opposed to the Nhus. In Phillips' judgment, we cannot win the war if the Nhus remain. He has this from Thuan, from Lac, the Vietnamese head of the strategic hamlet program, and from many military officers whom he has known over the years. All of them have come reluctantly to this conclusion.

Mr. Phillips said that we need a man to guide and operate a campaign to isolate the Nhus and to convince the government and people that the US will not support a government with Nhu in it, thus encouraging the military to do the job if Diem won't come around. He thinks there is one man who could guide and operate this campaign as a special assistant to the Ambassador and it was Ed Lansdale.

Mr. Phillips said that with all due respect to General Krulak's report, the US military advisers were not able to give credible evidence on political attitudes. They were under a direction not to talk politics with their Vietnamese counterparts and their Vietnamese counterparts knew of this and were reluctant to talk over politics with the American military. It was only with old American friends that they would discuss such matters.

The President asked what specific steps Mr. Phillips would recommend. Mr. Phillips said first he would cut aid to Colonel Tung.

The President asked whether Tung could not redirect other aid into his special units. Phillips said that we could go direct to the field, that Tung could get some help from the President but our cutting aid to Tung would have important political and psychological effects throughout Viet-Nam illustrating that we disapproved of Tung and Nhu and what they stood for.

Mr. Phillips suggested another specific step would be to cut aid to the Motion Picture Center which is now processing films laudatory of the Nhus. Another step was that in the approving of any new request for

aid we should require a signed statement that it was not to be used for repression and to build up the Nhus.

The President commented that it would be hard to get a signed statement with the latter phrase.

Mr. Phillips also suggested covert action to split Dinh and Col. Tung and to discredit them.

Ambassador Nolting asked what the result of all this would be. Would it be military action against the Nhus? Military action against the Government? Or decision by the Nhus that they have had it? What would be the result? Civil war or a quiet palace revolution? Mr. Phillips replied that he thought there was a good possibility of splitting Nhu from the President. He would expect some retaliation from Nhu, perhaps cutting aid programs that the US likes, but the result should be that Nhu would lose the support of officers and civil service people who now go along with him.

The President asked, "What about the possibility that Nhu's response would be to withdraw funds from the war and field to Saigon—retreating to Saigon and charging publicly that the US was causing them to lose the war?" Mr. Phillips said that the Army would not stand still for this—too many of the Army were on the Viet Cong assassination list. Furthermore, it was our money in the provinces. We controlled it and the Central Government could not in fact withdraw it. If worse came to worst we could take our plasters out to the provinces in suitcases. We started the strategic hamlet program this way and we could finish it this way.

General Krulak said that the advisers were not good on politics or palace intrigue but they were good on saying whether or not the war was being won and they do say that the war is going well.

The President asked how these differences could be explained. Mr. Phillips said that the war was going well in the first, second and third corps but it was emphatically not going well in the fourth corps, the Delta region. The strategic hamlets are being chewed to pieces by the Viet Cong. Fifty hamlets have been over-run recently. This deterioration of the war effort in the Delta, however, was not connected with political developments and repression of the Buddhists.

General Krulak said that Mr. Phillips was putting his judgment against General Harkins' judgment and that he, Krulak, would take Harkins'-the battle was not being lost in a purely military sense.⁶

The Secretary of State asked what Phillips thought of R.K.G. Thompson's idea that the Viet Cong might be turning to the cities.⁷

Phillips said that he did not think so; there was too much activity in the Delta. The strategic hamlets are not being protected; they are being overrun wholesale. Furthermore, in response to General Krulak, Mr. Phillips said that this was not a military war but a political war. It was a war for men's minds more than battles against the Viet Cong.

Mr. Mecklin reported as follows:

He concurred with Phillips and he especially wanted to underline the point about the American image. We are in deep trouble with politically-conscious people in Viet-Nam. The VOA has unbelievable prestige. The rural hamlets are hanging on every word and living off the VOA. There is a widespread feeling of appeal to the US—that we should do something. This is an unreasonable attitude to look to us to solve their problems, but that's the way it is. The US prestige was at stake in Viet-Nam and also in third countries. He said it was an absolute certainty that the military effort will be affected in time. The war had to be fought and managed by the Saigon elite and the officers corps attitudes would follow the attitude of the elites.

Mr. Mecklin felt that Phillips' suggestions were inadequate. He also had known Viet-Nam and the family for a decade. He thought that even cutting of all aid would not do the job quickly. There would be months of chaos; the government would eventually fall; but we don't know what we would get in exchange. He felt that we must be ready to use US combat forces; that we should start off by trying to remove the whole government, including Diem, since the Nhus are a symptom, not a cause. Then we might compromise and let Diem stay. The President asked what he thought US troops would do. Mr. Mecklin said that if we cut aid there would be retaliation so we would have to go in as we did in Lebanon and we should go in since Southeast Asia was so important to us.

The Secretary of State said that we should digest these reports and we should especially consider what it is that has happened in July and

August that has changed all our views that the war could be won with the Diem government.

Mr. McCone read from the June SNIE⁸ that indicated the intelligence community was even then not very hopeful.

The President expressed his gratitude to the four men who had so ably and succinctly reported. He said that there should be another meeting tomorrow.

For that meeting papers should be prepared describing the specific steps that we might take in a gradual and selective cut of aid, consulting the people who had returned from Viet-Nam and also the CIA in regard to its programs.

The President said that he was disturbed at the tendency both in Washington and Saigon to fight out our own battles via the newspapers. He quoted stories reflecting what seemed to be State Department views that Nhu must go and other stories (from the Journal American) saying that the Defense Department felt there had been inept diplomacy, etc. He said he wanted these different views fought out at this table and not indirectly through the newspapers.

The President wanted a cable to go to Saigon to the same effect,⁹ pointing out the story in this morning's Post of an American security officer telling a foreign newspaperman to take a picture so that it could be seen in Washington.

The President asked for a report on Congressional attitudes.

Mr. Hilsman reported his conversation with Senator Church and the fact that Senator Church has sent a copy of his proposed resolution¹⁰ to all Members of the Senate, and that Senator Church will be cooperative about the wording and timing of the resolution but might need some pressure if the decision was not to have a resolution at all.

The President instructed Mr. Hilsman to obtain a copy of this resolution and to consult with Mr. Dutton and Mr. O'Brien. The President thought the resolution might be helpful, but what would really pull the rug out from under us in Viet-Nam was if it was offered and then beaten. Certainly some would attack it on the grounds that we must not question a government fighting successfully against the Communists. We

would certainly need the support of Mansfield and Dirksen if our judgment was that such a resolution would be in our interest.

On the question of Madame Nhu, the President decided that we should not attempt to prevent her entry by means of denying or recalling her visa but should consider a letter to President Diem.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam, White House Meetings, State Memcons. Top Secret; Eyes Only. The meeting was held at the White House. Drafted by Hilsman. Bromley Smith's record of this meeting, published in part in *Declassified Documents*, 1982, 650A, is in the Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda, Meetings on Vietnam. Krulak's record of this meeting is in National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Trip to Vietnam, September 7-10.

² Document 82.

³ Based on [Document 78](#).

⁴ Krulak's record of this meeting cites Mendenhall as saying "that it was his [Mendenhall's] view, supported by Mr. Trueheart, the Deputy Chief of Mission in Saigon, that we will lose the war with the Diem Government."

⁵ Krulak's record of this meeting presents the following account of this portion of the discussion:

"Ambassador Nolting reminded Mr. Mendenhall that in 1961 he had made the same statement, forecasting that the VC would soon defeat the GVN. He asked Mendenhall to rationalize how, in the ensuing years, so much progress had been made by a government which he forecast could not survive. Mendenhall did not respond, because he was interrupted by the President, who asked how it could be that two people who had observed the same area could have such divergent reactions. After a period of silence, when it became evident that no one else was going to respond, I suggested to the President that the answer was plain—that Mr. Mendenhall had given him a metropolitan viewpoint on Vietnam; that I had given him a national viewpoint."

⁶ Krulak's record of his exchange with Phillips reads as follows:

"Mr. Bell then introduced Mr. Rufus Phillips, who gave a gloomy picture, stating that we were indeed losing the war, that in the Delta things were in a tragic state, that in Long An province, for example, 60% of the strategic hamlets had been overrun and that, contrary to what I had said, the military campaign was not going forward satisfactorily.

"The President asked if I cared to make a comment regarding Mr. Phillips' statement that we were losing the war militarily. I told him that my statement respecting military progress had its origin in a reservoir of many advisors who were doing nothing other than observe the prosecution of the war; that their view was shared and expressed officially by General Harkins and, as between General Harkins and Mr. Phillips, I would take General Harkins' assessment."

⁷ Krulak's record has Rusk asking another question:

"The Secretary of State asked Mr. Phillips how he could explain the totally different story regarding Secretary Thuan as reported to have taken place between Phillips and *Thuan* on 7 September (Saigon to State 447) and Harkins and Thuan on 8 September (MACV 1649). Phillips replied that Thuan and he were very good friends; that Thuan was completely uninhibited in his conversation with him; that with someone whom he knew less intimately, such as General Harkins, he would not bare his inner soul, but would try and say what he thought his auditor wanted to hear."

Telegram 447 is [Document 76](#). MACV 1649 has not been found.

⁸ vol. III, p. 483.

⁹ The Department of State sent telegram 376 to Saigon, September 10, which reads in part as follows: "It being emphasized here in all departments and desire you do likewise that any differences of points of view and on recommendations will be resolved entirely within official family and not debated in public press." (Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US)

¹⁰ See footnote 5, Document 70.

84. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) and Senator Frank Church¹

Washington, September 10, 1963—11:55 a.m.

SUBJECT

Proposed Vietnam Aid Res.

After exchanging pleasantries, Senator Church asked Mr. Hilsman how soon he would be leaving on his trip. Mr. Hilsman replied that it would not be until Friday evening.² He also said that he had talked with the President and that it was his understanding that he (RH) was to work with him and he asked for a number of copies of the proposed bill [resolution] for distribution to the Secretary of State, etc. to be sent to him as soon as possible. Senator Church said that he would be happy to do this.

Mr. Hilsman stated that he had two thoughts in mind. One was that they had better have a pretty careful explanation of its effect in Vietnam. The second was that the President wanted O'Brien and Dutton to work on this, too. Mr. Hilsman mentioned the fact that the one thing that would really "do us in" would be if the bill were to be defeated. Have to be sure that it is near unanimous.

Senator Church felt that first of all it should be introduced and then go on from the kind of support which develops after they know what it is all about. It seemed to him that there was good prospect of getting real support. This would be especially true if there were a keen feeling that it would be helpful to the President and not a bill designed just to be obstructional to the President. Felt that the way it should be worded would be to say that the continuation of our government to support a government in South Vietnam which persists in religious persecution offends the United States and can not be continued.

Mr. Hilsman said that Nolting and Maggie Higgins have insisted that there is no religious persecution. But, however, he said that he could assist Senator Church with the language.

Senator Church felt that there was a definite feeling in the world and around the Congress that there definitely was religious persecution. Mr. Hilsman assured him that the statement could be modified, for instance, by use of the wording "repression of Buddhists."

Senator Church mentioned that he had sent a copy of the proposed resolution to the other senators and that an introductory statement was being prepared, a copy of which he would send to Mr. Hilsman.³

Senator Church thought that the situation would come up in the President's press conference on Thursday.⁴ He thought that he ought not to undercut his own bargaining position the way he did yesterday.⁵ If he were to say that he understood this resolution relates to a continuation of religious repression, which if continued would make our position increasingly difficult, his bargaining lever would be kept available. It was Senator Church's thought that the President should be fully informed along these lines. Mr. Hilsman stated that he was sure the President would be thoroughly briefed, but one couldn't promise as to his actual words.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Memoranda of Conversations. Drafted by Hilsman.

² September 13.

³ In telegram 392 to Saigon, September 12, the Department sent the Embassy a copy of the text of the proposed Church resolution, which had 22 cosponsors, but which was lying "at desk" one week to obtain additional sponsors. The text reads: "Resolved, That it is the sense of the Senate that unless the Government of South Viet Nam abandons policies of repression against its own people and makes a determined and effective effort to regain their support, military and economic assistance to that government should not be continued." (Department of State, Central Files, AID(US) S VIET)

⁴ The question did arise at the President's news conference of September 12. The President agreed with Senator Church's view that the United States should continue to assist South Vietnam. He also indicated "our feeling that the assistance we give should be used in the most effective way possible." (*Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1963*, p. 676)

⁵ Apparent reference to the President's interview on the "Huntley-Brinkley Report," September 9; text of the interview is *ibid.*, pp. 658-661.

In it, the President indicated his belief that reduction in U.S. aid would not be helpful "at this time," since it might affect the government structure in Vietnam.

85. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, September 10, 1963—5:45 p.m.

SUBJECT
Vietnam

PRESENT
Secretary McNamara, Attorney General, Director McCone, Under Secretary Harriman, Director Bell, Director Murrow, General Taylor, General Krulak, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric, Assistant Secretary Hilsman, Mr. Colby, Mr. Phillips (AID), Mr. Janow (AID), Mr. Bundy, Mr. Sorensen, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Bromley Smith

Mr. Bundy opened the meeting by making the following points:

1. He requested that each agency list all current programs being carried out in Vietnam.
2. He suggested the drafting in Washington of a guidance document to be sent to all U.S. agency officials which would define the posture and attitude to be followed by all U.S. government officials in Vietnam.
3. He suggested that we need a document to provide press guidance for use in Washington and in Vietnam.
4. He recommended that we develop a way of controlling all U.S. messages going to Vietnam.

Mr. Bundy pointed out that U.S. policy is as the President has stated in his last two public statements, copies attached.²

The Attorney General stated his view that we should now concentrate on specifics. All agreed that the war would go better without Nhu and Diem. How much do we pay for a change? He said he did not think we should discuss with the President generalities and differences of view. What we should now do is to concern ourselves with specific actions.

Secretary McNamara thought we ought to try to change Diem's policies. He believed our present policy was not viable. He thought that we had been trying to overthrow Diem, but we had no alternative to Diem that he knew about. Therefore, we were making it impossible to continue to work with Diem on the one hand and, on the other, not developing an alternative solution. He felt that we should go back to what we were doing three weeks ago.

Under Secretary Harriman stated his flat disagreement. He said Diem had created a situation where we cannot back him.³

Mr. Murrow said that the military views as represented by Secretary McNamara, General Taylor and General Krulak were saying that our sole objective was to win the war and that we could win with Diem. The civilian side believed that the political situation was deteriorating so rapidly in Vietnam that we must replace Diem before his eroding position led to a collapse of the fight against the Viet Cong.

During a discussion of how we should use Congressional criticism of Vietnam to advance our objectives, Mr. Hilsman said Senator Church would be fully responsive to suggestions as to the wording of the Senate resolution and to the timing of its introduction. Mr. Bell pointed out that we might well use Congressional criticism of Diem in an effort to persuade Diem to change his ways, but that such criticism would be reflected in the debate on the aid program, which would be hard to control.

Mr. McCone expressed his doubt that alternative leadership existed in Vietnam. He said he had heard various names but he knew of no paper which listed a group which could form a government strong enough to rule if Diem and Nhu were removed.

Mr. Hilsman described a two-prong pressure program on Diem with the aim of forcing him to change his present policies. He acknowledged that if we started down this path we would have to be prepared to contemplate the use of U.S. forces on the ground in Vietnam.

General Taylor indicated his support of the position that we should continue to work on Diem and revealed a reluctance to contemplate the use of U.S. troops in combat in Vietnam, either against the Diem government or against the Viet Cong.

Mr. Bundy asked that two papers be prepared by Mr. Hilsman, the first listing our objectives in Vietnam and the second a program of pressures against Diem with the aim of forcing him to meet our demands. Mr. McCone was asked to prepare a paper on alternative leadership. Mr. Forrestal was asked to develop a paper recommending a delay in any decision for a sufficient time for the situation to ripen.

Mr. Harriman reminded the group that the policy of the U.S. was as stated by the President and that he agreed with it fully. He did not

believe we should discuss changing that policy.

Secretary McNamara and Mr. Bundy disagreed and felt that the group had an obligation to the President to review the policy in the light of the developing situation. Mr. Harriman and Secretary McNamara disagreed as to whether we could or could not achieve our objectives in Vietnam with Diem in control.

Mr. Murrow asked that he be relieved of writing press guidance until after tomorrow's meeting in view of the fact that the guidance could not be written until our policy was clear.

Bromley Smith⁴

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. The meeting was held in the Department of State. Also published in part in Declassified Documents, 1982, 650B. A memorandum for the record of this meeting by Krulak is in the National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Trip to Vietnam, September 7-10.

² See [Document 50](#) and footnote 5, Document 85.

³ Krulak's record reports the McNamara-Harriman exchange as follows:

"Mr. McNamara proposed that we start with a clean slate and review the problem in terms of our objectives. To this Governor Harriman said that to start with a clean slate was not permissible; that we have to operate within the public statements already made by the President; that we cannot begin afresh, overlooking the fact that Diem had gravely offended the world community."

⁴ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

86. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 11, 1963, 2 p.m.

478. Eyes only for the Secretary from Lodge. My best estimate of the current situation in Viet Nam is:

- a. That it is worsening rapidly;
- b. That the time has arrived for the US to use what effective sanctions it has to bring about the fall of the existing government and the installation of another; and
- c. That intensive study should be given by the best brains in the government to all the details, procedures and variants in connection with the suspension of aid.

Herewith is the background for this proposal:

1. I do not doubt the military judgment that the war in the countryside is going well now. But, as one who has had long connection with the military, I do doubt the value of the answers which are given by young officers to direct questions by Generals—or, for that matter, by Ambassadors. The urge to give an optimistic and favorable answer is quite unsurmountable—and understandable. I, therefore, doubt the statement often made that the military are not affected by developments in Saigon and cities generally.
2. The fact that Saigon is “only one-seventh” of the population does not allow for the fact that there are a number of other cities and that the cities in the long run must play a vital military role. For example, the junior officers in the Vietnamese Army come, as they do in all countries, largely from families which are educated, the so-called elite. These people live largely in the cities. The evidence grows that this elite is filled with hostility towards the Govt of Viet Nam, consider therefore the lieutenant in the Vietnamese Army whose father has probably been imprisoned; whose mother has seen her religion insulted, if not persecuted, whose older brother has had an arbitrary fine imposed on him—and who all hate the government with good reason. Can the lieutenant be indifferent to that? Now come the high school demonstrations and the fact that the lieutenant's younger brother has probably been dragged off in a truck (bearing the US insignia) to

camping areas with the result that our lieutenant also has a deeply disaffected younger brother, if not a sister, who has been handled disrespectfully by the police.

3. Is it conceivable that this will not affect the energy with which the lieutenant will do his job in supporting his government? Is it any wonder that I hear reports of a major in the G-3 section of a corps headquarters who simply sits and does nothing because he is disgusted with the government? Must there not inevitably be a tendency—not for something spectacular and mutinous—but for the soldiers to get less aggressive and for the populations to get less sympathetic to the war effort? And as this happens will not the popularity of the US inevitably suffer because we are so closely supporting a regime which is now brutalizing children, although we are clearly able, in the opinion of Vietnamese, to change it if we wanted to?
4. Does not all of this mean that time is not on the side of the military effort and that if the situation in the cities is not improved, the military effort is bound to suffer?
5. But instead of improving, everything I can learn shows me that the situation is getting worse. The demonstrations in the schools are to me extremely curious and impressive manifestations. Out of nowhere apparently appears a banner and a plan to put up a roadblock or a scheme for conducting a parade. Perhaps this is the work of Communist agents, even though the students are undoubtedly not Communists. The latest rumor is that there will soon be similar demonstrations by civil servants—and what a fantastic confusion this will create and the government is obviously cut off from reality—not looking at anything objectively but solely concerned with fighting back, proving how right it has been—and privately thumbing its nose at the US.
6. For these reasons it seems to me that the ship of state here is slowly sinking. This brings me to the conclusion, that if there are effective sanctions which we can apply, we should apply them in order to force a drastic change in government. The only sanction which I can see is the suspension of aid and therefore I recommend that the best brains in the government study precise details of suspending aid so as to do ourselves the most good and the least harm.
7. Let us, for example, assume that our aim is to get rid of Nhu. I use this purely for illustrative purposes, as we may think of something better. Once we have made up our minds that we are willing to suspend aid, should we not make a private threat that unless Nhu was removed we would suspend aid? This procedure might have two advantages: First it might result in Nhu's being removed. But,

secondly, it would seem to put us on the popular side of the question and would then, when news of it leaked, tend to separate the government from the people. Also, when the tremendous shock of aid suspension took place, it should lessen the hatred which would be visited on us. This should be a period of action with perhaps a few leaks and with a minimum of statements by us—certainly not emotion-stirring statements which would arouse the xenophobia which is always latent here and the arousing of which would strengthen the GVN. We might, for example, be able to express our horror at the brutalization of children, but even this is risky if we are the ones who are doing the talking.

8. Renewed efforts should be made to activate by whatever positive inducements we can offer the man who would take over the government—Big Minh or whoever we might suggest. We do not want to substitute a Castro for a Batista.
9. We should at the same time start evacuation of all dependents. Both in order to avoid the dangers to dependents which would inevitably ensue, but also for the startling effect which this might have.
10. As the aid suspension went publicly into effect, we should be prepared to launch a massive program to protect the lives of the little people in the cities from starvation. Should this be soup kitchens, or should it mean taking anti-inflationary measures?
11. As aid suspension went into effect publicly, should we not start another quiet program to keep the Army supplied so that the war against the Viet-Cong should go on? Should not the Army be supplied by totally bypassing the Govt of Viet Nam, with supplies coming directly from the US to the Vietnamese Army?
12. Might we not thus bring sanctions to bear on the government without impeding the war effort and without making ourselves hated all over the world, as would be the case were there famines and misery?
13. Admittedly this is difficult and intricate and perhaps impossible, but it is also utterly vital and I recommend that it be studied without delay. We are giving it as much study as we can here in the Embassy.
14. If we decide to wait and see, we run certain risks:
 - a. That the future leadership of Viet Nam, the educated classes—already completely out of sympathy with the regime, and disillusioned with and distrustful of us as the instruments of change—will lose heart. (For while waiting we shall have to resume the role of supporters of the regime.)
 - b. More importantly, those individuals whom the regime regards as proximate threats will be systematically eliminated from contention in one way or another.

In short, by a wait-and-see approach, we insure that when and if we decide that we cannot win with the present regime, we shall have even less to work with in terms of opposition than we have now.

What is even more dangerous is that the situation here may not wait for us. The student demonstrations in Saigon, for example, are profoundly disturbing. At the very least, these reflect in the most unmistakable way the deep discontent of the middle and upper-class population of Saigon. They are also the classic vehicle for Communist action. There is thus the real possibility of the situation getting out of hand in such a way that only the Communists will be in a position to act—when and if we decide that we cannot win with this regime.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Received at 3:16 a.m. and passed to the White House and CIA at 4:48 a.m.

87. Memorandum for the Record of Discussion at the Daily White House Staff Meeting¹

Washington, September 11, 1963, 8 a.m.

1. Mr. Bundy presided throughout the meeting.
2. Vietnam. Bundy opened the meeting by asking Forrestal if he had seen the latest Lodge report from Vietnam,² which Bundy said was one of his best. He added that this would surely lead the President to calling a meeting on Vietnam during the day. Forrestal agreed.

Bundy was visibly disturbed by the way things are going in Vietnam and, in a revelation one seldom sees, seemed at a loss about what to do. When asked if he had seen the Reston article in today's paper (attached),³ he said that he had, that he had talked with Reston yesterday, but had batted only about 213 on that particular item. He later said that at least Reston supported continuing the war in the article, which he did not do at the beginning of the discussion yesterday.

The Reston article led to a general discussion of newspaper treatment of the situation on Vietnam. Bundy remarked that, under the circumstances, he thought the newspaper treatment had been mild; it could legitimately have been much worse. He remarked that someone in the State Department had been talking to Tad Szulc, who was writing inaccurate reports. Forrestal said that he didn't know who it was, but that Szulc was particularly unreliable. Schlesinger, back since yesterday, dissented and said that Szulc actually had a sound base, but just did some "imaginative extrapolation." After laughter died down, this led to a discussion about how to handle bright young reporters who "extrapolated." Carl Kaysen, down on a consultant status, said he believed it was preferable to give them a line for their story rather than have them go off half-cocked in the wrong direction. The matter was left up in the air there.

About this point, Bromley Smith brought in a ticker tape that Diem's brother, Archbishop Ngo Dinh Thuc, was coming to the United States, having left Rome today. The purpose of his visit will be to make arrangements for Madam Nhu's visit. Already wobbly, this was close to the last blow for Bundy, who said that this was the first time the world

had been faced with collective madness in a ruling family since the days of the czars. Ralph Dungan said that, if the Pope was peeved with the Archbishop, Cardinal Spellman would undoubtedly put him under wraps in New York.

[Here follows discussion of matters unrelated to Vietnam.]

¹ Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by Major William Y Smith, Taylor's aide.

² *Supra*.

³ James Reston's article appeared in *The New York Times* September 11. It was entitled "On Suppressing the News Instead of the Nhus." It had as its central premise that the Diem government was doing the American public a disservice by censoring American correspondents in Vietnam. Reston also charged the Kennedy administration with clumsiness in handling the crisis. Reston suggested that the President should insist that the American-supplied equipment not be used against Buddhists and that the administration provide more information about the CIA's role in Saigon. Reston, however, did state that proposed congressional plans to cut off aid so long as Diem remained in power would lead to a "loss of the Vietnamese peninsula and more."

88. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, September 11, 1963—11:35 a.m.

TELEPHONE CALL FROM MR BUNDY

B said Pres' reaction on Lodge message² is he is personally inclined to think this assessment is most powerful he has seen on this situation. Mtg of Standing Group at 6 and Pres will join.³

B asked if Sec were coming to teal of payt mtg at 5 and Sec said he understood only Ken Galbraith would be there. B said it is Sec's choice. B replied he does not think there will be decisions and Sec decided he better stay with Viet-Nam.

B said yesterday's session⁴ was difficult: McNamara and Taylor just don't buy the assessment this is going to get worse and something serious must be done. Bob said after reading Lodge's cable that while he did not agree with it and Max did not either he was going to mobilize the Dept to do this if the Pres decides to. B said that may be easier for Bob to do than the Dept. Harriman just says the decision has been made and this is the way we want it. Sec will spend rest of the day on it. Sec said it bothers him because Lodge has not laid it out before Diem. B said he does not think he has had a chance. Referred to what he said in message. B said Hilsman knows the rest of the details.

¹ Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Phyllis D. Bernau.

² Document 86.

³ See Documents 93 and [94](#).

⁴ See Document 83.

89. Paper Prepared by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)¹

Washington, September 11, 1963.

U.S. OBJECTIVES IN CURRENT VIET-NAM SITUATION

I. Background

U.S. Policy in Viet-Nam since the 1954 partition of the country by the Geneva Agreements has been directed toward the securing and maintenance of a strong, viable and free South Viet-Nam capable of resisting Communist aggression with U.S. assistance and support.

II. Broad U.S. Objective in Current Situation

The U.S. policy objective should continue to be the maintenance of a viable, strong and free area in South Viet-Nam capable of maintaining its independence, successfully resisting Communist aggression, and susceptible to U.S. influence.

Prerequisite: To achieve this objective South Viet-Nam must have a regime and government capable of drawing sufficient popular support in the broad mass of the population and that degree of support in the Vietnamese elites required for the effective and dynamic communication of leadership to the masses of the population. Vietnamese leadership must be basically responsive to the burden of aspirations of the people as a whole.

III. Specific U.S. Objectives in Current Situation

A. Personnel Changes in GVN Leadership Under Diem.

1. Exile of Ngo Dinh Nhu and Mme Nhu.

- (a) Ngo Dinh Nhu should be removed from all government positions and should leave Viet-Nam for permanent or quasi-permanent exile. He should be accompanied in exile by Mme Nhu.
- (b) This in itself would be principal signal expected by Vietnamese leadership and population as a whole that the U.S. has been able to

force the situation, and that the character and nature of the GVN has changed in the direction they desire.

2. *Appointment of Vice President Tho or Minister Thuan as Acting Prime Minister until new Elections are Held.*

(a) Diem should agree to “reign more and do less” and to appoint preferably Vice President Tho, or alternatively Secretary of State Thuan as Acting Prime Minister.

(b) This would further convey to the Vietnamese that a real change is taking place in the character of the regime.

3. *Introduction of New Personalities in the Vietnamese Cabinet.*

(a) General Duong Van Minh, Acting Chief of the General Staff, should be named as Chief of the Joint General Staff with cabinet rank.

(b) General Nguyen Khanh should be named Secretary of State for National Defense.

(c) General Le Van Kim should be named Secretary of State to the Presidency in place of Thuan, who could be designated Vice Prime Minister if Tho is named Acting Prime Minister.

4.

[(d)] Tran Quoc Buu, head of the Vietnamese Labor Confederation, should be named to a cabinet post.

Similarly, Dr. Pham Huy Quat, and Vu Quoc Thuc should be given ministerial positions.

5. [4.] These are not impossible demands since none of the civilians mentioned are open opponents of the Diem regime and the generals have thus far at least ostensibly loyally supported the President.

These changes would further convey the changing character of the now thoroughly discredited Diem government.

B. Policy Changes Under Diem.

1.

There should be a clearly announced policy statement made to the National Assembly convoked in extraordinary session reversing current GVN repressive policies.

Specifically: (a) All those arrested as a result of recent events should be released without penalty, and thoroughly amnestied.

- (b) Martial law should be revoked and press censorship removed.
- (c) A joint statement of reconciliation should be negotiated by Tho as Acting Prime Minister between Diem and a reconstituted committee of the real bonzes. These do not need to include Tri Quang but should include at least Thich Thien Khiet, Mai Tho Truyen and Thich Thien Minh.

The joint statement should include provision for reconstitution for all damage and indemnification of all victims as can be agreed.

- (d) Decree Law No. 10 should be repealed immediately by executive action subject to confirmation by vote of the National Assembly at its extraordinary session.
- (e) Diem should make a unilateral statement of explanation for the policies of the GVN since May 8 to the extraordinary session of the National Assembly.
- (f) The same statement should schedule new elections to be held at a defined date and should give his guarantee that such elections will be held in full and complete freedom.
- (g) The entire statement to the National Assembly, and proposals made therein should be subject to vote of confidence by the Assembly or covered by Assembly resolution expressing such confidence.

2.

Prosecution of the War.

Subject to the above we should tell Diem that we are ready to prosecute our program to annihilate the Viet Cong menace with renewed vigor and that we expect full cooperation from him in this endeavor.

We should undertake in agreement with him to assist in the quiet removal from Viet-Nam of certain persons, both official and private, presently in Viet-Nam and who may have become anathema to him or to ourselves.

3.

U.S. Influence in Conduct of the War.

We should reach at least oral agreement with Diem that the role of U.S. civilian and military advisors will remain unimpaired as heretofore and that we will be able to continue to station personnel for advisory purposes at the provincial and district level and in combat units to the extent required. In exchange we should be ready to inform Diem that we would place General Lansdale at his disposal, if requested, to assist in providing him political advice during the difficult period after the departure of his brother.

C. Specific U.S. Objectives in Case Diem Refuses to Accede Substantially to A. and B.

1. *Minimum Objective Under Ngo Dinh Diem.*

(a)

Removal of Ngo Dinh Nhu.

At a very minimum our objective should be the removal of Ngo Dinh Nhu and Madame Nhu from all government positions.

(b)

Introduction of New Personalities in GVN.

At a very minimum our objective should be the introduction of new personalities without the appointment of Tho or Thuan as Prime Minister.

(c)

Change of Policies.

The objectives stated above form a minimum in terms of policy changes for the GVN to restore its image and public support under present leadership.

2.

Removal of Ngo Dinh Diem.

If Diem refuses to agree substantially to courses of action calculated to produce the above objectives we should be prepared outright to tell him that we believe his usefulness as chief of state in Viet-Nam has

come to a close and that we will no longer support or assist him or his government.

We should suggest that Diem abandon rule without struggle or violence and give way to Vice President Tho in the capacity of Acting President until new presidential elections can be held in Viet-Nam.

3.

Accession of New Leadership Under Vice President Tho.

Whether or not Diem agrees to A. we should be prepared to support alternative leadership under Vice President Tho (see separate paper).²

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries, Vietnam, Undated. There is no drafting information on the source text, but this is apparently the first paper Bundy asked Hilsman to prepare; [see Document 85](#).

² Not found.

90. Paper Prepared by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)¹

Washington, September 11, 1963.

POSSIBLE POLITICAL PRESSURE WEAPONS FOR USE AGAINST DIEM AND NHU

1. Decision of Afro-Asian group to raise GVN repressive measures at regular session of UNGA.
2. Statement by the U.S. to Diem and/or publicly to the effect that U.S. demands that the GVN cease the use of all U.S.-supplied equipment for the repression of non-Communists. Institution of end-use checks to determine whether our demand is being complied with.
3. Appropriately timed leaks on Nhu's contacts with the DRV to effect that Nhu is selling out to the Communists.
4. Suspension of CAS programs in support of the GVN.
5. Evacuation of American dependents from Viet-Nam.
6. As a follow-up to Mr. Hilsman's cable re Senate sentiment on Viet-Nam,² a cable on Senator Church's statement that he will introduce resolution to stop aid to Viet-Nam unless GVN changes its repressive nature.
7. Removal of wraps on Tri Quang so that press can interview him. Purpose: to get across to the public that GVN gestures toward the Buddhists are meaningless and to demonstrate to Diem and Nhu that U.S. may consider Tri Quang a political alternative.
8. Informing the press that U.S. visa being issued to Foreign Minister Vu Van Mau.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries, Vietnam, Undated. Secret. There is no drafting information on the source text, but this is apparently the second paper Bundy asked Hilsman to prepare; [see Document 85](#).

² Document 63.

91. Memorandum Prepared by Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff¹

Washington, September 11, 1963.

SUBJECT

South Vietnam

1. The purpose of this memorandum is to analyze some of the favorable and adverse consequences of a U.S. policy toward South Vietnam which would involve the minimum of change in our current relationships with the GVN. It is assumed that under such an approach we would continue to press the GVN, both publicly and privately, for the kinds of changes in policy which we have already recommended to them. We would attempt to maintain and improve our normal contacts with the GVN at all levels and avoid taking any "incorrect" actions. We would not make any significant changes in our aid policy. We would try to maintain a balance in our public posture between expressions of disapproval of specific repressive actions of the GVN and support for Vietnam in its struggle against the Communists.
2. The following are some of the principal arguments in favor of such a policy:
 - (a) There is a possibility that a hands-off approach by the United States to the internal politics of South Vietnam would permit the natural political forces within the country to achieve their own solution. The United States would not be involved in the replacement of the present government nor in the selection of a new one, with the result that a new government would not be stigmatized as a U.S. puppet. It is also possible that once it became clear that the United States would not involve itself, local leaders (both civilian and military), who up to now have been unwilling or unable to act, would accept the fact that initiative for change would have to come from themselves. If it is true that the political situation in Saigon will continue to deteriorate, the pressures for such local action should build up.
 - (b) A decision not to use economic sanctions would, of course, avoid the disruptive effects of a suspension of U.S. aid. The war effort in the countryside, at least, in its material aspects, would not be disturbed; and we would not add to the confusion in the cities by triggering a possible runaway inflation.

- (c) Although we have already discovered that there is a disinclination among senior military leaders to take any action in the present circumstance, it would seem likely that as conditions within the country became more chaotic, they would be forced to take collective action. It has been suggested that since the military stand the most to lose in the event of a Communist take-over, their self-interest will eventually force them to work for a change in the government. To the extent that military aid continues uninterrupted, they will not be denied the resources to effect a change, and their attitude toward the United States should not worsen.
 - (d) Despite the voices in the United States which would be critical of such a policy, a recent analysis by the Department of State of editorial opinion in the newspapers² suggests that—at present at least—there is a fairly even division over the question of whether we should get tough or ride it out. In any event, the suggested policy will be justified by whether or not it succeeds in producing the desired changes in GVN policy and personnel. Thus, the real question is whether U.S. domestic opinion will allow us sufficient time to determine whether the Vietnamese can solve their own problems. On this question we are in the best position to make a sound judgment.
 - (e) The same comment would presumably apply to world opinion; and to the extent that the pressure of domestic U.S. and world opinion can be brought to bear on the GVN, U.S. interests would seem to be furthered. Reiteration of our disapproval of the repressive actions of the Diem Government would, for a time at least, preserve the U.S. from complete identification with the unpopular acts of the GVN.
 - (f) One of the most attractive factors in the suggested policy is that it tends to preserve a wider range of options open to us. If our objectives are not achieved after a reasonable period of time, or if the situation deteriorates to a point where hard evidence indicates that an eventual collapse of the war effort is certain, we should still be able to move up the scale and adopt more aggressive tactics. On the other hand, once we embark on a program of graduated sanctions, turning back would not seem feasible.
3. Some of the adverse consequences of the suggested policy can be summarized as follows:
- (a) A fundamental assumption has to be made that there is sufficient time to permit all of the internal and external pressures upon the GVN to change its policies and personnel to crystallize and produce remedial action. We do not have the kind of hard evidence that enables us to predict with any accuracy whether there is enough time. We do not know whether the structure of the civilian

- government and the military in South Vietnam would hold together long enough while local initiative for change takes effect.
- (b) We also do not know what the alternatives are as they appear to the Vietnamese themselves. It is possible that instead of reacting to continued political deterioration in a positive manner, the educated civilian segment of the society might relapse into complete apathy, or worse, turn secretly in the direction of the Viet Cong. As for the military, there also is a lack of information on their physical ability to pull themselves together in the midst of the disintegrating situation. Can, for example, commanders outside of Saigon communicate independently and effectively with each other?
 - (c) Another obvious problem would be the degree of influence, if any, which the U.S. could have in the formation of a new government should a local initiative crystallize. Despite our public condemnation of repression, there might remain sufficient hostility to the United States among Vietnamese leaders to make it difficult for us to communicate effectively with them. Some of this disadvantage might be avoided if we were to maintain covert contact with the leaders of local coup groups. This would probably be easier to do in the case of military leaders than in the case of civilians, although we have some evidence that even the former are becoming less willing to talk with us.
 - (d) Although we are probably on reasonably sure ground in assessing our ability to weather domestic U.S. criticism of the suggested policy, we may not be able to assess foreign reaction with the same certainty. It is possible, for example, that a number of Governments, including some friendly ones, would begin pressuring for a Laotian-type solution in Vietnam. Our ability to maintain the American presence there might be seriously compromised if international pressures for the neutralization of South Vietnam got out of hand.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous, Part 1. Secret. There is no drafting information on the source text, but this is apparently the paper Bundy asked Forrestal to prepare; [see Document 85](#).

² American Opinion Summary, prepared by the Public Opinion Studies Staff, Bureau of Public Affairs, dated September 10. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG 59: Office of Public Opinion Studies, "U.S. Policy on S. Vietnam, April-Dec. 1963")

92. Research Memorandum From the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hughes) to the Secretary of State¹

Washington, September 11, 1963.

RFE-78

SUBJECT

Hanoi, Paris, Saigon, and South Vietnam's Future

Proliferating reports of varying credibility allege activity on the part of Ngo Dinh Nhu to negotiate with Hanoi on South Vietnam's future, with or without French connivance. At this stage it is impossible to ascertain fully the validity of such reports but their plausibility and implication are assessed below for contingency planning purposes.

Abstract

President De Gaulle's statement of August 29² reflects his long-standing belief that neutralization of Southeast Asia is inevitable and desirable. However, neither his words nor reports of French diplomatic activity in Saigon indicate any clear and imminent intention of moving to bring this about in South Vietnam. Nonetheless, his statement and these reports provide a basis for Ngo Dinh Nhu to threaten, directly or indirectly, that clandestine contacts between Saigon and Hanoi might arrange a settlement contrary to United States interests. This threat may be merely a bluff to reduce United States pressures upon Nhu; should it go further Diem would probably stop such activity well short of any deal with Ho Chi Minh. Hanoi, however, would attempt to encourage such contacts if only to exploit contradictions within the non-Communist camp. Conceivably the mixture of truth and rumor, contrived and accidental, could bring about diplomatic pressures for an international conference on Vietnam. Soviet Russia might back such a move; Communist China would reluctantly go along if it thought this could force a withdrawal of the United States from South Vietnam.

[Here follows the main body of the memorandum.]

¹ Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, Pol 15 Gov't. Secret; No Foreign Dissem; Limit Distribution.

² See [footnote 7](#), [Document 26](#).

93. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, September 11, 1963, 6 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PRESENT

Secretary Rusk, Attorney General, Director McCone, Director Murrow, General Taylor, General Krulak, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric, Assistant Secretary Hilsman, Assistant Secretary Manning, Mr. Janow (AID), Mr. Colby, Mr. Bundy, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Bromley Smith

Secretary Rusk, who had read Ambassador Lodge's estimate of the current situation contained in Saigon 478, attached,² reviewed the situation as seen in Washington. He said those in Saigon were in the center of developments, and as a result, felt strongly about what they thought ought to be done. He recalled that the U.S., over the past years, had gained considerable experience in dealing with individuals who, in effect, controlled their governments, i.e. Chiang Kai-shek, Syngman Rhee, etc. From the Washington viewpoint, what was happening in Saigon was not a new situation. He felt that it was most important for us here to be clear as to what our objectives are in Vietnam. He thought we ought to try to define the perimeters of our problems. The U.S. came back into Vietnam in a major way in 1959 in response to an intensified Viet Cong campaign. If U.S. presence is not needed now, we should leave, but we want to leave behind an independent Vietnam. We cannot leave if to do so consists of abandoning Vietnam to the Viet Cong. At the other extreme, we do not want to apply U.S. force because, if we introduce U.S. troops, we will have resumed the situation in Vietnam to that which existed when the French were fighting a colonial war there. He said Nhu probably has to go, but this did not mean that we had to turn against Diem. It is possible for us to work with Diem. Possibly we can persuade Diem to separate from Nhu. Maybe we can't, but as of now, we don't know whether we can force Diem to exile Nhu. Ambassador Lodge so far has not been able to break through to Diem and to conduct meaningful conversations. We do not underestimate the capacity of Diem and Nhu to pull the temple down around their heads and ours if they won't buy what we demand. It is possible that Nhu may turn to the northern Vietnamese and make a deal with them if he concludes that he cannot accept our requirements. As to the reports we receive of U.S. citizens' conversations with their Vietnamese friends, he doubted that

when the fate of a nation is at stake we should put very much reliance on what the Vietnamese tell their American friends.

Turning to a draft paper outlining U.S. objectives in South Vietnam (copy attached),³ he expressed doubt that we should cut back U.S. aid which is essential to the war effort in Vietnam or reduce aid which benefits the Vietnamese people. He acknowledged the difficulty of finding pressures which we could use which actually bite into the Diem government.

Secretary Rusk recommended that the next step consists of instructing Ambassador Lodge to wrestle with Diem in an effort to prompt Diem to make changes in the government we feel are essential if the war effort is to succeed. He pointed out that the degree of urgency should be thought of in terms of weeks. We are not in a hurry in terms of the coming days. His comment referred to a sentence in the objectives paper which states that our judgment is that there is a time urgency.

Mr. Gilpatric reported that the Defense Department had looked closely at our entire military assistance program to Vietnam and concluded that to suspend any part of it would mean an immediate halt to the war effort in Vietnam. This is true in part because our assistance covers spare parts and ammunition.

Secretary Rusk continued his general remarks by recalling a situation on Mainland China during the time when Chiang Kai-shek was encountering dissidence and opposition. The U.S. had decided to terminate its support to China, stepped out of the Chinese picture, and the Communist Mao took over. He saw similarities in the Vietnamese situation and argued that we must not yield to the temptation of despairing of Diem and act in a way which would result in the Communists taking Vietnam. There are several alternatives yet available to us before we have to choose between getting out or sending in U.S. combat troops. If we do go in with U.S. combat troops, the Vietnamese will turn against us. Perhaps we should offer to assist Diem in finding out whether the Viet Cong was responsible for instigating the student riots.

General Taylor supported Secretary Rusk's comments by urging that we look at what is happening in Vietnam in historical perspective. He asked who would organize a religious, political movement in opposition to an existing government during a time when that government was fighting a civil war. He said he doubted that Lincoln, during the Civil War, would

have acted in a way to meet the protests of a religious, political movement.

Secretary Rusk expressed his belief that both political and religious factors were involved in the Buddhist demonstrations. He speculated that the protest may have started in Hue as a religious protest, which later became a political protest.

Mr. Hilsman said we had never accused the Vietnamese of religious persecution, but only religious oppression.

General Taylor turned to his thought of asking how actions are to be evaluated when they take place in the midst of a civil war. He believed that there had been some penetration by the Viet Cong of the Buddhists who had staged the demonstrations. He suggested that to clarify our thinking we should separate those things we must have from those things we would like to have from Diem.

Mr. Bundy said he liked Secretary Rusk's sense of timing, i.e., that we do not reach a crisis within days, but rather within weeks.

General Taylor advocated that we avoid pin pricks which serve to annoy Diem. He recommended that in conversations with Diem we be serious and tell him the things that he must do if he is to continue to receive help from us.

Mr. Gilpatric said Defense favored a suggestion that had been made to evacuate all U.S. dependents from Vietnam as a way of indicating to Diem how seriously we felt about the changes we were asking him to make. Both Secretary Rusk and Mr. Bundy shared this view.

Mr. Bundy said we should start pressures against Diem. We are not sure these pressures will be effective, but we can begin now to contain Nhu's power. If Nhu's power continues to ascend in the way it has in the past few weeks, and if Nhu continues to carry out his ideas of how to govern Vietnam, we cannot win the war against the Communists.

Secretary Rusk said that the removal of Nhu would be the symbol of a reconciliation by Diem with the Vietnamese people and with the U.S.

Mr. Hilsman called attention to his paper entitled "A Plan to Achieve U.S. Objectives in South Vietnam," copy attached.⁴ He said this plan was

merely a concept, but it did have specific courses of action which illustrated how the concept would become reality.

General Taylor returned to the question of urgency. In his view, there is none. Mr. Hilsman commented that this time reference involved weeks and months. Mr. McCone said the Agency estimated we would have a grace period of three months before there was real trouble.

The Attorney General asked whether any estimate had ever been made as to how Diem would react if we said he must do certain specified things or we would withdraw from Vietnam. Mr. McCone said no such estimate had been made. Mr. Gilpatric recalled that some believed Diem would pull the house down around him in reaction to an ultimatum.

Mr. Hilsman said that former Ambassador Nolting believed that if we made clear to Diem that Congress might force us to drastically reduce aid, Diem might yield.

Mr. Hilsman said we might withdraw aid to Colonel Tung's Special Forces. Mr. McCone replied that this could not be done. Aid to the Special Forces was so interlaced that we could not stop some forms of aid without affecting others. General Taylor also doubted there would be any way in which we could withhold support from Colonel Tung alone. Mr. Hilsman repeated his view that he believed such action was possible.

The group turned to a discussion of a Congressional resolution proposed by Senator Church. Secretary Rusk was concerned that our support of such a resolution might get out of control. He predicted that Senators who are opposed to aid would vote for us along with those who would use the withdrawal of aid as a sanction to force Diem to change his method of governing. He agreed that we should encourage Senators to sound off, but was not enthusiastic about voting a specific resolution. Mr. Bundy commented that the plan proposed by Mr. Hilsman put too much weight on press policy. Mr. Murrow agreed. He recommended that we not leak our decisions to the press, as recommended in the plan, but make formal, precise announcements.

General Taylor commented that the plan would not overcome Nhu if he chose to resist.

Mr. Bundy suggested we could tell Diem that we are cutting all links to Nhu and thus isolate Nhu. We would give assistance for the prosecution

of the war, but not through Nhu or Colonel Tung. He did not favor the use of black press stories.

In response to a question, Mr. Colby said that Colonel Tung was a nonentity. Mr. Murrow asked then why we should hit him. Mr. Hilsman responded that we were seeking to attack Nhu through Colonel Tung.

General Taylor asked whether the objective of the plan is to reduce the influence of Nhu or eliminate him. Mr. Hilsman responded that the courses of action recommended in the plan will have very limited material effect, but those who are expert in Vietnamese affairs say that the actions proposed will have a profound psychological effect.

General Taylor asked what we do if the plan fails. Mr. Bundy said we need not look at the plan in such black and white terms. He said we could live with an interim target for months. We could decide later if we had to take more drastic action.

Mr. Hilsman said one objective was to take actions, plus words, to disassociate the U.S. government from Nhu. The report is still circulating in Saigon that we fully support Nhu. If we succeeded in disassociating ourselves from Nhu, this may result in his removal.

Mr. Bundy said a good case could be made for continuing U.S. aid, but he suggested that we should build up our own distribution system so that if we wish to redirect our aid we would have a capability of doing so. We do not now have this capability because our aid is distributed by the Vietnamese. Mr. Janow replied by saying that we cannot take over the distribution of our aid. The system is so built that it will defeat the objective of phase one actions. He pointed out that we must decide soon on what we are going to do about several major pending issues, the biggest one being whether we go forward or not with a new PL 480 agreement. If we do, and if we take other big aid steps, the small actions suggested in phase one will be ineffective.

Mr. McCone said that Nhu's base is wider than Colonel Tung's Special Forces. Mr. Hilsman said the steps in his plan were not aimed at achieving a material effect, but rather at creating a psychological effect while continuing to support the war effort.

Mr. Bundy said no one could estimate whether the plan would succeed or not. He said he saw no serious objection in an effort to break the tie between Nhu and the U.S.

Secretary Rusk said that the next step is another attack on Diem by Ambassador Lodge. He said we should review the bidding for the past eight years. Then we should call attention to what has happened in the last few months. We could then explain to Diem that we were behind him in his effort to win the war, but that the actions of the last few months would have to be dealt with in a way which would increase his public support.

Mr. Bundy then read extracts from a paper prepared by Mr. Colby⁵ which outlined an approach by the U.S. to Nhu in an effort to prompt him to take actions which would result in our being able to support him in the government.

At this point the meeting adjourned to the Cabinet Room (separate memorandum of record).⁶

Bromley Smith⁷

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. The meeting was held at the White House. The source text indicates the President did not attend the meeting. A memorandum for the record of this meeting by Krulak is in the National Defense University, Taylor Papers, Trip to Vietnam, September 7-10.

² Not attached, but see [Document 86](#).

³ Not attached, but see [Document 89](#).

⁴ Krulak's record of this meeting makes it clear that Hilsman is referring to early drafts of his "Reconciliation" and "Pressures and Persuasions" track papers. For the drafts as printed, see attachments to [Document 114](#). Krulak's record reads as follows:

"The Group then studied the draft program prepared by Mr. Hilsman. Mr. Bundy made the point that the paper was too much in reliance on the press and on press leaks. General Taylor stated that the proposed Phase I actions would not get rid of Nhu if suasion failed. Mr. Bundy agreed with this, saying that we are not going to get rid of Nhu by putting out black newspapers. He does, however, like the idea of threatening the evacuation of dependents on the basis of pure risk to their well being."

⁵ Not found, but Colby describes this paper in *Honorable Men*, pp. 212-213. He notes that it was “clearly out of tune with the Administration's temper.”

⁶ Document 94.

⁷ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

94. Memorandum of Conference With the President¹

Washington, September 11, 1963, 7 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

OTHERS PRESENT

Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, Director McCone, Director Murrow, General Taylor, General Krulak, Under Secretary Harriman, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric, Assistant Secretary Hilsman, Assistant Secretary Manning, Mr. Janow (AID), Mr. Colby, Mr. Bundy, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Bromley Smith, Attorney General

Secretary Rusk reviewed for the President the summary of the situation which he had given the group earlier.² He emphasized that Nhu has become a symbol which has to be removed. Ambassador Lodge hasn't yet gotten through to Diem. We cannot assume that Diem will not move in our direction. On the other hand, if we move against Diem too fast, we cannot dismiss the possibility that he might bring the Vietnamese house down around him and go to North Vietnam for assistance, possibly with help from the French. He cautioned against reacting to people in the field who want to get on with the job and are frustrated by the problem. He referred to Mr. Hilsman's plan which he said did not involve really important actions, but would have an important psychological effect. He recommended that Ambassador Lodge be told to tell Diem to start acting like the President of Vietnam and get on with the war.

Mr. Hilsman briefly summarized the concept of the draft plan.³

Mr. Bundy pointed out that the differences between the Hilsman plan and Ambassador Lodge's view is that the latter is asking for suspension of aid. It turns out that it is not easy to cut U.S. aid without stopping the war effort.

Mr. Gilpatric added that cutting U.S. military aid would have an immediate and telling effect on the war effort. Most of our aid involves airplanes. We could, however, withdraw dependents without hurting the war effort.

The President asked whether deterioration has set in and whether the situation is serious. Mr. McCone replied that within three months the

situation may become serious.

Secretary McNamara said we could not estimate whether the situation would become serious in three months. He said there had been as yet no serious effect on the war effort. Ambassador Lodge wants action on aid, wants to oust Nhu, and is thinking of a new coup. Secretary Rusk is opposed and he agrees that we should take no hurried action.

Secretary Dillon said he doubted we could get in real touch with Diem. We cannot count on doing so, but we must make the effort. Secretary Rusk agreed.

Director McCone said he agreed with Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara that we should proceed cautiously. Ambassador Lodge has not been there very long. He should see the country rather than merely Saigon. We cannot cut our aid to Colonel Tung without jeopardizing the entire counterinsurgency movement in the northern part of South Vietnam. This would be the cost of creating pressures in Saigon on Diem. We should make another approach to Nhu.

At this point the President read the ticker report of Madame Nhu's interview with reporters in Belgrade (copy attached).⁴

Mr. Bundy commented that the worse Madame Nhu becomes the easier it is to argue that she must get out of the Vietnamese government.

The President felt that some reply was called for. How could we continue to have her making anti-American comments at the same time she is one of the leaders of a government we are supporting?

The President asked for a paper containing details of the plan suggested by Mr. Hilsman. He wanted to see the interrelationships of the various proposed courses of action. Mr. Hilsman responded that his paper was merely a concept and that proposed courses of action were illustrative of how it might be put into effect.

Mr. McCone suggested that another approach be made to Nhu. He believed that CIA official Richardson in Saigon should not now talk to Nhu. He suggested that Mr. Colby, who knows Nhu, be sent from Washington to Saigon to talk to him.

The President asked whether a draft letter to Diem had been prepared for him as he had suggested. Mr. Bundy replied that it was felt that a

letter from the President to Diem asking Diem to silence Madame Nhu would be difficult to write because it dealt with what, in effect, was a family matter. In addition, if the letter became public, the complications might be serious. It was felt that Ambassador Lodge should be instructed to ask Diem orally to silence Madame Nhu.

The President said his idea of a letter was to spell out our general view toward the situation faced by Diem. This is one method of getting Ambassador Lodge going on his conversations with Diem. The letter would not be released to the press. He asked that a draft of our concerns and our complaints be prepared for him. As to a Congressional resolution, he thought it would be helpful, but only if we could control the ensuing situation.

Mr. Bundy said we could support the introduction of the resolution and then suggest that it not be acted upon in a hurry. Secretary Rusk and Senator Mansfield shared the view that the resolution should be introduced, but that hearings on it be delayed.

The President expressed his concern that an effort would be made to attach the resolution to the aid bill. He wanted us to work with the Congressional Committees so that we would not end up with a resolution requiring that we reduce aid. The objective was a resolution merely condemning current actions of the Diem government. We must not get into a situation in which the resolution could be defeated. We should try to avoid having it tied to the aid program.

The President said we need to send an instruction to Ambassador Lodge, including in that instruction a request that he attempt to hush up the press in Saigon.⁵

Mr. Bundy pointed out that we should start now contingency planning for the evacuation of U.S. dependents. Secretary McNamara agreed. Some 5000 dependents are involved and Defense is responsible for moving them. He felt that evacuation of dependents is a very definite signal to Diem. In addition, he has been concerned about our capability to remove dependents in a crisis situation and favors removing them before any disorders break out. Mr. Murrow suggested that we announce the intention to evacuate dependents rather than leak it to the press. He pointed out that evacuation risks the possibility that the world will conclude that we are taking the first step toward pulling out of Vietnam. He said, however, we have to take this risk.

Mr. Bundy said we would, of course, have to consult Congressional leaders before ordering dependents to leave. What we should do was make our in-house preparations, but not decide now to remove dependents. General Taylor added that we should withdraw the dependents in a way which would produce action from Diem.

The President said we should tell Ambassador Lodge that we are considering his cable. He believed that we should express our concerns to Diem and get a response from him. He agreed that for the next few days all aid decisions should be held up.

Bromley Smith⁶

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. The meeting was held in the White House.

² See [Document 93](#).

³ See [footnote 4, Document 93](#).

⁴ Not attached. In Belgrade attending the Interparliamentary Union, Madame Nhu stated on September 11 that "President Kennedy is a politician, and when he hears a loud opinion speaking in a certain way, he tries to appease it somehow". She continued: "if that opinion is misinformed, the solution is not to bow to it, but the solution should be to inform." (Quoted in Sobel, ea., *South Vietnam*, 1961-65, vol. I, p. 67)

⁵ Telegram 387 to Saigon, September 11, 9- p.m., from Hilsman to Lodge, asked that the Ambassador "hold tightest hand on press leaks." (Department of State, Central Files. POL 15-1 S VIET)

⁶ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

95. Memorandum From the Director of the United States Information Agency (Murrow) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)¹

Washington, September 11, 1963.

I handed the following to McGeorge Bundy at today's meeting.² Until further notice, it will serve as guidelines for our media output on Viet-Nam.

1. Continue to give ample coverage in news output of expressions of U.S. displeasure with aspects of the Diem regime.
2. Watch for and pick up third country, Congressional, and U.S. non-governmental comment critical of the repressive aspects of the Vietnamese government.
3. Seek opportunities to emphasize the difficulties of continuing aid to Viet-Nam on the present scale and, in the President's words, "at this time" in view of growing Congressional concern.
4. Seek opportunities for emphasizing the need to carry the war against the Viet-Cong to a successful conclusion, and particularly evidences of success toward that end.

ER Murrow

¹ Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, PR-11, Press Relations. Confidential.

² See [Documents 93](#) and [94](#).

96. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (Krulak)¹

Saigon, September 12, 1963—11:55 a.m.

MAC 1675. Ref your JCS 3527-63.² It's all right to plan evacuation of dependents-but let's stop there unless we're going to give up SEA, and we must never do that. The battle here is not lost by any manner of means. In fact it's being won. I think we must all realize we are fighting a ruthless, crude, brutal enemy who is using every known trick in the Communist bag. In 1960 he saw he was losing the initial round so he openly flexed his biceps. Our tremendous effort of the past year and one half began to pay off early this year and he saw he was losing the military battle. In seeking a new approach he seized the religious one. Bonze Quang, the culprit we now are giving asylum to in our Embassy, has admitted in conversations since he entered his safe haven that he had been planning to go full out against the Diem regime prior to May 8th. He seized upon this episode as his opportunity. Though the government made concessions, Quang and his cohorts refused to accept them, always demanding more. He remained unable to unseat Diem. The 21st of August crackdown stopped the outward religious effort, and now the school children. This of course is another well organized covertly led Communist trick. And a tough one to handle-but another must. We have chosen to fight Communist aggression here in Southeast Asia; and we must be prepared to meet its every form at every crossroad. This we are doing. If we fail here it will only mean the pattern of failure to come. We're stronger physically, mentally, and morally than the enemy. We must be stronger in our will, determination, and sacrifice. No we haven't lost this one by a long shot and we must not take counsel in our fears. Perhaps some of the tools are tired and worn-having been practically at war since 1945 they must be. So it's another must for us to sharpen the cutting edges of the old or come up with some new, and get on with the offensive. "Amen".

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to CINCPAC exclusive

for Felt. Krulak sent copies to General Wheeler, General LeMay, Admiral MacDonald, and General Shoup, and to Bundy at the White House; McCone at the CIA; and Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman at the Department of State.

² Reference is to JCS telegram 120030Z (JCS 3527-63), September 11, exclusive for Felt and for information exclusive for Harkins, which noted that "Washington level" planning on the evacuation of dependents would begin the next day, "against the possibility that such a step may be determined upon later." (*Ibid.*)

97. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 12, 1963, 4 p.m.

391. Eyes only for the Ambassador.

1. Highest level meeting September 11,² discussed your 478³ and draft State Department plan for multiple pressures, public and private, to remove Nhu from scene.⁴
2. Sense of meeting was that you should continue frequent conversations with Diem, although all recognize how frustrating these are. On this point Secretary will be sending you a separate cable.⁵
3. In the meantime we preparing plans for consideration highest level of variety of concrete moves we can make to give you additional leverage.
4. Among these are the following:
 - (a) Evacuation of all dependents, which strikes us as desirable.
 - (b) Senate Resolution, along lines Frank Church's proposal⁶ providing we are sure it will pass with large majority and will not be amended so as to tie the Administration's hands.
 - (c) Phased plan of isolation Nhu, including giving aid directly to units and programs and bypassing central government.
5. Re your 483,⁷ in the meantime and over the next few days while fundamental decisions being formulated, AID will stall on the major negotiations or finalizing actions now pending.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared by Rusk and Bromley Smith. Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD exclusive to Felt.

² See [Documents 93](#) and [94](#).

³ Document 86.

⁴ Apparent reference to [Documents 89](#) and [90](#).

⁵ Document 98.

⁶ See [footnote 3](#), [Document 84](#).

⁷ In telegram 483, September 11, the Embassy and USOM questioned the wisdom of delaying aid programs to Vietnam, suggested that U.S. policy make a clear distinction between the Palace and the Vietnamese people, and suspend aid only on projects which would affect Diem and his immediate circle of supporters. (Department of State, Central Files, AID(US) S VIET)

98. Draft Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 12, 1963.

Eyes only for Ambassador from Secretary. Following are some of my thoughts against the background of the voluminous and most helpful information coming from you and country team.

1. Although situation in Saigon is understandably intensive preoccupation of those who have been carrying such a heavy load for us under difficult and dangerous circumstances, this is not first time that the US Government has been confronted with far-reaching issues affecting vital interests in a country whose leadership stubbornly resists measures which we consider necessary to achieve desired results. One thinks of Chiang Kai-shek on the mainland, Syngman Rhee, Sihanouk, Nasser, Mossadegh and others.
2. Our central objective remains a secure and independent South Viet-Nam even though, at some future date, it may be possible to consider a free, independent and non-communist unified country. This central objective was what brought us into South Viet-Nam and its achievement is the condition for our leaving. No one would be happier than we to leave under that circumstance.
3. It seems to me that there are outer limits of policy within which we must therefore operate unless the situation forces us to break through those limits. One would be that we do not get out and turn South Viet-Nam over to the Viet-Cong. The other would be that we do not use large-scale forces to occupy the country and run it ourselves.
4. The key question is what has gone wrong to block or reverse the favorable developments of the first six months of this year when we were beginning to feel that a corner had been turned and that we could anticipate a successful conclusion. The central fact appears to be that the political solidarity of the Vietnamese, notably that of the elite and leadership groups, has disintegrated under the impact of the Buddhist problem, press policy, student and intellectual disaffection, and increasing fears and distrust within the leadership itself. This seriously negative development seems to be geared to brother and Madame Nhu and in the process the position of President Diem has been weakened politically at home, overseas, and more specifically with our Congress and public opinion. The two Nhuses seem clearly to

be at the heart of the problem both on the merits and symbolically at home and abroad.

5. I agree fully with your sense of urgency which I am inclined to measure in weeks rather than in days. It seems to me that at present we should concentrate on Diem himself to make him see that everything he has been working for for the past ten years is threatened with collapse and failure and that bold and far-sighted action on his part is urgently required in order to unite the country and get it back on a favorable course. This may require persistent talks with him in the days ahead in which we would insist that he listen for a change and break through the flood of words which he uses to avoid coming to grips with his real problems. The question of what type of pressures and when such pressures should be applied is the essence of the judgement which you will have to make on the spot. I am inclined to think that in the next immediate stage we should not threaten what we will not or cannot deliver and that we are not yet ready to cut off assistance which affects the war effort or which would inflict serious damage to the people as contrasted with the regime. You have unlimited information to make clear to him that real statesmanship from him is now required to reverse the collapse of his position at home, internationally and in the United States. Our next approach to him might well be, therefore, to review with him the record of his tenure of the Presidency, including the admittedly positive and courageous contributions he has made and appeal to his pride and patriotism to move toward success and not failure. This could introduce frank and firm discussion of what needs to be done including the baleful effect which the Nhus have been having on his country. Incidentally, we shall be sending you a separate message on Madame Nhu's visit to the United States,² a visit which could well be disastrous for Viet-Nam and not merely an irritant for the US Government.
6. In sum, and reviewing some of our successes and failures in the past in dealing with similar difficult personalities, it seems to me that our real problem now is to come to grips with Diem and be prepared to exchange our full confidence and support for the actions which he must take, however difficult, if there is to be a chance for success. I mention confidence because, despite the fact that his position both originally and now has been made possible by persistent and costly American support, he has on several occasions over the past several years undoubtedly gotten the impression that we were trying to unhorse him. It may be that it will be impossible to succeed along this line but the alternatives are so far-reaching that the present effort seems to me to be worth the tedious and frustrating hours which will

undoubtedly be required to get through to him and get him to carry out his own full responsibility.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Secret. Drafted by Rusk. In a telephone call to Hilsman, at 8:23 p.m., September 11, Rusk discussed the drafting of this telegram:

“Sec said he would go home tonight and draft a fairly long discursive message to Lodge to give his own views on paper but H might go ahead on the letter idea. Sec would think that is the means by which we try to get this fellow on board there through persuasion without at this stage a lot of other things that go along with it. Sec replied it would be a presidential letter. H will be sending Lodge cable tonight and will call Sec tonight on WH phone.” (Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations)

Regarding the Presidential letter, see [Document 115](#). The cable Hilsman mentioned is presumably telegram 391, [Document 97](#). There is no record of another telephone conversation between Hilsman and Rusk on the night of September 11. The cable printed here was not sent; see [INFRA](#).

² Apparent reference to telegram 405 to Saigon, September 13, in which the Department informed Lodge that “our feeling is that official approach to Diem on Madame Nhu's possible activities in US not desirable at this time. Would appreciate your ideas on how Madame Nhu's trip to US could be discouraged in a manner not attributable to official US action, for example, do you think there is any possibility that Asta could accomplish it?” (Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US)

99. Memorandum for the Record of a Meeting¹

Washington, September 12, 1963, 6 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PRESENT

Secretary Rusk
Secretary McNamara
Mr. McCone
Mr. Gilpatric
The Attorney General
Mr. Bundy
Governor Harriman
Mr. Colby
Mr. Hilsman
Ambassador Nolting
Mr. Forrestal
Mr. Mendenhall
Mr. Phillips
Mr. Mecklin
Mr. Murrow
General Krulak

1. The Group initially read a CIA summary² of all the messages which had come in over the past two days. The summary was considered to be so valuable that Mr. McCone was asked if he could bring it up to date daily, and include within it a list of indicators of major change. Examples were how many Buddhists remain imprisoned; students imprisoned; changes in martial law, curfew, etc.
2. Mr. Bundy opened the meeting by referring to General Harkins' message where he stated that the Communists had deeply infiltrated the Buddhists and students.³ Mr. McCone stated that CIA had little specific information on the matter. Mr. Rusk observed that under any circumstance the government would claim that this was the case, while the Communists would certainly seek to invade these movements. Mr. McNamara stated that we would query General Harkins to determine factual background on the report that there is Communist motivation and control in the Buddhist/student movements.
3. With respect to political orientation of the Buddhists, Ambassador Nolting stated that in early July one of the bonzes came to CIA and asked who the U.S. would like to see as President when they overthrew Diem.

4. Mr. McNamara asked that the Group consider what we really want Diem to do, stating that it is important that these points be listed. He mentioned such things as the removal of censorship and relaxation of military law. Mr. Bundy added that actions of over-repression, such as hauling truck-loads of people to jail, should also be eliminated; and Mr. Rusk added that there should be an end to the arrests of people simply because they oppose the government.
5. Mr. Rusk asked what progress had been made in the study regarding evacuation of dependents. Mr. Hilsman replied that the working group was developing a plan, which would be reported upon to him tomorrow and to the Executive Committee on Monday.⁴
6. The Group then was given a draft message by Secretary Rusk (attached).⁵ After reading it there was considerable discussion as to the impact of the cable on Ambassador Lodge. It was Mr. Bundy's view that it would convey a major change in policy, from one of urgent action to one of restrained sequential steps. He stated that no such step should be taken over a week-end. It was generally agreed that Mr. Rusk's draft message did, in fact, exhibit a major change in thinking here in Washington.
7. Mr. Bundy observed that there was probably still some divergency in Washington, and in this sense Mr. McNamara suggested that Secretary Rusk's message seemed to try to bridge that gap, which is not desirable.
8. It was ultimately agreed that the message would be restudied and, in the meantime, that a brief message be sent to Ambassador Lodge tomorrow stating that his proposals are still under study and that, in the interim, he should go back to Diem to speak about the matter of Madame Nhu, the Senator Church resolution, and the attitude of the U.S. Congress.⁶
9. Mr. McCone stated that there are many more things that should be considered, such as sending a personal emissary to Diem; arranging for a meeting between Cardinal Spellman and Archbishop Thuc; sending a personal emissary to Nhu to persuade him to leave the country; seeking to get the Foreign Minister to return; and seeking to get Diem to appoint a military man as Assistant Minister of Defense.⁷
10. Mr. Bundy obtained the concurrence of the Group that there is no urgency for sending a major policy message to Ambassador Lodge for the next two or three days.
11. The Group then read a draft letter from the President to President Diem.⁸ It was generally agreed that such a letter should be forwarded, although this one required some careful study.

12. Mr. McNamara observed that transmittal of such a letter should be preceded by agreement here as to our objectives. In discussing objectives, Governor Harriman stated that it had always been his view that we should work on Diem to improve the government, while still seeking to remove Nhu. Mr. Bundy stated that this is unrealistic; that the general judgment is that splitting the brothers will not work. Mr. McNamara observed that the Defense Department viewpoint is not one of personalities, but one of objectives and actions, and again asked if we could not list the elements of an action program. It was then agreed that a check-list of objectives would be developed by the State Department tomorrow. This would be followed by a comprehensive check-list of the pressures to be used to achieve these objectives, to be completed by Monday. With respect to the second list, Mr. McNamara requested, and it was agreed, that the matter of aid pressures would be kept separate from the remainder.

V.H. Krulak
Major General, USMC

¹ Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-186-69. Top Secret; Sensitive. Drafted by Krulak. The meeting was held at the White House.

² Not found.

³ Document 96.

⁴ September 16.

⁵ Document 98.

⁶ Presumably a reference to telegram 391, [Document 97](#), which was already sent before this meeting began.

⁷ Regarding the origin of these points, see [Document 100](#).

⁸ Document 115.

100. Editorial Note

At the meeting of September 12, 1963, McCone mentioned several additional courses of action; see numbered paragraph 9 of [Document 99](#). McCone's points were taken directly from an unattributed CIA paper entitled "A Program for Vietnam," dated September 4. They comprise paragraphs a-e of what is described in the paper as a program which would "be a reasonably feasible outcome of current problems of Vietnam, although flexibility should be maintained on specific components." The additional points of the program, which McCone did not mention, read as follows:

"f. Continue and strengthen Vice President Tho's committee to negotiate a settlement of the Buddhist problem, emphasizing dealings with the local and provincial level clergy, pagodas, etc., on a religious, nonpolitical, basis.

"g. Terminate martial law, reactivate the civilian ministries, and hold the National Assembly elections as soon as reasonably possible. It would not be worth an effort to open the lists to new candidacies as it would be doubtful that any substantial opposition would present itself in any case.

"h. Reshuffle the government in certain minor respects such as replacing Ngo Trong Hieu as Minister of Civic Action.

"i. Endeavor to replace Nhu's advisory role vis-a-vis Diem with a Vietnamese in whom he would have confidence. This might be a combination of two or three in a 'Kitchen Cabinet' to include such figures as Tran Quoc Buu, Trong Vinh Le (extremely weak but probably reassuring to Diem), Tran Ngoc Lien.

"j. Clarify the Vietnam Special Forces High Command (Colonel Tung) subordination to the Joint General Staff. The formal structure now provides for this but we could make particular efforts to ensure a Joint General Staff feeling of full knowledge and at least veto of VNSFHC activities.

"The above suggestions would be supplementary to and conceived as simultaneous with a program of graduated pressures on Diem which carefully signal to him the likelihood of more compelling

U.S. actions, forced upon us by pressures of U.S. public and international opinion. They would indicate a sincere search for a way out which would continue the war and Diem's leadership thereof." (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous)

101. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 12, 1963—9:38 p.m.

396. Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge from the President. Your 478² is a major paper and has stirred a corresponding effort to concert a proper response here.

Since it is one thing to talk of these matters and quite another to put them into effective step-by-step operation, we cannot make the big decisions until we have sorted out the staff work. The difficulties and intricacies which your message points out seem to be at least as bad as you think, so this process will take several days.

While we are working, I want you to know that your courageous and searching analysis has already been of great help, and that the strength and dignity of your position on the scene are clear.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET Top Secret; Priority. The text of this message was sent from the White House.

² Document 86.

102. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 13, 1963.

505. Eyes only for the Secretary. CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Adm Felt. Deptel 391.²

1. Do not see advantage of frequent conversations with Diem if I have nothing new to bring up. Believe mere repetition of points already made would look weak. Visiting Diem is an extremely time-consuming procedure, and it seems to me there are many better ways in which I can use my waking hours. One is by going ahead with my diplomatic calls on the members of the Cabinet who are numerous and who give me interesting information and, of course, another is to spend some time thinking. Not enough hours in the day to do everything I want to do.
2. Do not believe either your paragraph 4 a or b will bring removal of the Nhus unless they are geared to a Vietnamese coup d'etat which is well organized around one man. I would certainly not do a or b as isolated measures.
3. Hope some study will be given to what our response should be if Nhu, in the course of a negotiation with North Vietnam, should ask the US to leave South Vietnam or to make a major reduction in forces. This is obviously the only trump card he has got and it is obviously of the highest importance. It is also obvious to me that we must not leave. But the question of finding a proper basis for remaining is at first blush not simple.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Top Secret. There is no time of transmission on the source text. Received at 7:02 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House at 7:30 a.m.

² Document 97.

103. Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between
the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs
(Harriman) and the Director of Central Intelligence
(McCone)¹

Washington, September 13, 1963—10:10 a.m.

Mr. McCone called Governor Harriman. Mr. McCone said he is becoming increasingly concerned over the report of the possibility of Nhu making a deal up north. He said he is going out to the station to say concentrate attention immediately on that problem. He wondered if State might want to do the same thing with Cabot. Governor said yes, he thinks it is a good idea.² Governor said if he does that we are in a much stronger position. He isn't going to get anywhere with the people. Mr. McCone said he didn't know whether that is true or not. Governor said he thinks if our soldiers are right at all, the spirit of fight against the Communists seems to be the one thing they agree on. Mr. McCone said depends on basis of deal he makes. Mr. McCone referred to Thompson's cable this morning.³ Governor said not sure he saw that; he saw Thompson telegram yesterday dealing with it.⁴

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Mildred Leatherman of Harriman's staff.

² In telegram 406 to Saigon, September 13—7:48 p.m., the Department asked the Embassy to be particularly alert to indications of the Government of Vietnam's contacts with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. (Department of State, Har-Van Files, South Vietnam Policy File, August 31-September 15, 1963)

³ Not found.

⁴ Reference is to telegram 496 from Saigon, September 12, 6 p.m., in which the Embassy summarized a conversation with the British adviser to the South Vietnamese Government, R.G.K. Thompson. Thompson noted that the war could still be won if the Government of Vietnam "totally changed its conduct, looked to the future and spoke to the country eloquently about the 'National Campaign Plan'." He had no hopes that the situation would change for the better and "stressed the dangerous tendency in the GVN to overdo political activities and to be preoccupied

with fighting back via press interviews." The Embassy concluded:
"Thompson believed the only trump card Nhu had was the withdrawal
of the US. For this, he said, North Vietnam would pay almost any price.
What, he asked, would we do if the Govt of Vietnam invited us to
leave?" (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET)

104. Letter From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Secretary of State¹

Saigon, September 13, 1963.

DEAR DEAN: I ask that you show this letter to the President personally, as it is vital that it not get into the governmental paper mill. For maximum security I am typing it myself² and am sending it to you by messenger.

What I ask is that General Lansdale be sent over here at once to take charge, under my supervision, of all U.S. relationships with a change of government here. To function efficiently he must have a staff and I therefore ask that he be put in charge of the CAS station in the Embassy, relieving the present incumbent, Mr. John Richardson.

This is said without casting any reflection on Mr. Richardson. Indeed I think of him as a devoted, intelligent and patriotic American. If his loyal support in the past of the U.S. policy of winning the war with Diem has made it difficult for him to carry out a different policy now, he has never said so or showed it. If, as I am inclined to think, Vietnamese have naturally suspected him of being pro-Diem, it has not been his fault.

My request to put General Lansdale in his place is not because I have anything but praise of Mr. Richardson, but because of my belief that we need a new face and that General Lansdale has outstanding qualifications.

But I hope John McCone will be told my [of] my high regard for Mr. Richardson.

CAS telegram [*document number not declassified*] September 11,³ is the most encouraging report I have seen since arriving in Vietnam. And it is confirmed by a wholly independent source in whom I have great confidence.

No written answer to this letter is necessary.⁴ General Lansdale's arrival will be a more than adequate response.

I hope you will tell the President how much I value his message contained in Deptel 396.⁵

With warm regards

As ever yours

Cabot L.

¹ Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Correspondence-L. Top Secret; Eyes Only.

² The source text was inexpertly typed.

³ Not found.

⁴ In a letter to Rusk, September 24, Lodge informed Rusk that McCone had fumed down his request. Lodge commented: "It is really a pity. Had my request been granted, I believe the coup might have been pulled off." He continued:

"You can be sure I will continue to do my very best to carry out instructions even if I must use persons trained in the old way, who are widely (and however unjustly) believed to be in touch with those who we are trying to replace and who, without ever meaning to be disloyal, do in fact neither understand nor approve of current United States policy." (Department of States, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Correspondence-L)

⁵ Document 101.

105. Memorandum Prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)¹

Washington, September 13, 1963.

Summary of Cable from Sheldon:

1. Brent, Director of USOM, concurs with Sheldon's recently expressed views as do most of the military. Rufus Phillips dissents and Brent's staff dissents.
2. Brent feels we must stop, look and listen before exercising sanctions by cutting off aid as such action would adversely affect South Viet Nam's closely balanced economy.
3. General Timmes, Chief, MAAG, expressed firm opinion from ARVN division level down that there is no discernible lessening of troop discipline, morale or will to prosecute the war effort. The senior officers have been paying attention recently to political rather than military matters.
4. Ambassador and Trueheart convinced war cannot be won with regime, timing [*time*] running out, cutting off aid would provoke unpredictable and uncontrollable situation; Ambassador considering initiating coup through General Don with MACV. The Ambassador has the authority to undertake this. Ambassador feels that if such a plan were frustrated by Diem/Nhu and therefore failed, U.S. would be faced with invitation out of SVN.
5. The original abortive attempt to stimulate a coup was based on hope rather than reality with the SVN generals. This attempt revealed to Nhu, leaving U.S. in a weak position. Nhu has further consolidated his position but lacks organization and direct command on part of SVN generals, except for General Dinh who supports Nhu and whose Headquarters are penetrated by Nhu's agents.
6. In summary the U.S. now lacks a means to stage another coup attempt under circumstances of control which will guarantee success.
7. Proponents of complete cessation of aid feel this would provide necessary and sufficient catalyst for early overthrow of government but belief is that Nhu has built into the military establishment effective checks and balances to impede generals from taking action.
8. Lack of realistic opportunity for coup narrows chances to exert pressure for reforms on regime. Selective aid cuts considered extremely complex and must be approached carefully because of effect on

economy, currency, etc. Reduction in military aid would directly affect SVN's ability to pursue struggle against VC. Cut in Colonel Tung's Special Forces would probably have no effect on portion of his operation which is active in the political arena. Certain aid frills could be cut but they would have little immediate effect on the regime and would merely be a nuisance.

9. We must note we have been conspicuously unsuccessful in long series of attempts to get Diem to liberalize his regime. Diem in the past has been immovable, extremely stubborn and absolutely closed to outside influences and considers concessions a sign of weakness. There is little hope that Diem will agree to the withdrawal of Nhu from the scene as he considers Nhu indispensable as driving force behind strategic hamlet program and as political manipulator.
10. Following a business-as-usual course in the interest of biding our time until successful alternative appears. We run the risk of having the Diem regime solidify its position and thereby further limit our courses of action.

John A. McCone²

¹ Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, South Vietnam Policy, August 31 through September 15, 1963. Top Secret. In a covering memorandum to Rusk, September 14, an assistant to McCone informed him that McCone's summary was of a cable "from a senior CIA headquarters official who has paid a recent visit to Saigon." Copies were also sent to McNamara and McGeorge Bundy. Also included as an attachment was a copy of CIA telegram 0890 from Saigon, September 13, the telegram which McCone is summarizing.

² Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

106. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 14, 1963, 1 p.m.

507. CINCPAC/POLAD exclusive for Admiral Felt. Eyes only for the Secretary. Your 405.²

1. Agree another demarche by me to Diem to prevent Mme. Nhu from talking would be a mistake. I have already told both Diem and Nhu that she should stop talking. I made quite a point of it. My guess is that they have on occasion tried to restrain her without accomplishing much, although she was relatively quiet during my first three weeks in Vietnam.
2. Diem answered me last Monday that Mme. Nhu was going to hold press conferences in New York as a matter of justice to herself and he evidently approved of her doing so. I told him it would have a bad effect on US opinion. While I believe they have urged her to keep still, there is no doubt that they both approve the general tenor of her speeches. This is one of the things that is fundamentally wrong with the family; they prefer to spend their time striking back at old insults, which result in more bad publicity, instead of going ahead with the war, thereby bringing constructive events to pass which would give them a good press. They seem to take no interest in what other people may think, but are simply interested in expressing their own feelings and their own pride. They are really non-politicians.
3. Do not believe [*less than 1 line not declassified*] would succeed, as he has already pushed Mme. Nhu to the limit to behave herself—once on the telephone in my presence and on two other occasions in personal visits.
4. We are using your wire giving the text of the Church resolution³ and are pointing out that one more foolish speech by Mme. Nhu could put more signatures onto the resolution.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Top Secret; Priority. Received at 3:11 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White

House at 4:44 a.m.

² See [footnote 2, Document 98](#).

³ See [footnote 3, Document 84](#).

107. Letter From the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)¹

Washington, September 14, 1963.

DEAR CABOT: Thanks for your note of the 28th² in regard to the prompt action taken on one of your messages which is difficult always to do.

All hands here have great admiration for the courageous and incisive manner in which you have moved so rapidly in your new responsibilities.

What makes for some confusion, and therefore some delay in answers to your messages, is the matter of some differences that exist between General Harkins' estimates and conclusions and your own. I assume you see all his messages. It might be helpful where you find yourself in disagreement if you would comment on the differences and explain why. Perhaps there is not as much difference as appears from this end, and therefore an explanation of the differences which do exist and the reasons for them would be helpful.

In this connection, it was of course clearly understood here that General Krulak's reports were based on his contacts with the military, whereas Mendenhall's were based on the civilian.

I suggest you keep this letter personal between us and not refer to it in telegrams. These get wide distribution. I hope you will feel free to call upon me at any time you feel that I can personally be of assistance to you.

I can assure you that from the President on down everybody is determined to support you and the country team in winning the war against the Viet Cong. There may be some differences in opinion or in emphasis as to how it is to be done, but there are no quitters here.

The photographs in the press of your short-sleeved walk through the market place got you a lot of votes here, and I am sure make a new impression of an American Ambassador and his wife in Saigon.

Marie joins in sending you and Emily our love and all best wishes.

Sincerely,

Averell³

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Vietnam Policy. Personal and Confidential.

² Not found.

³ Printed from a copy that bears this stamped signature.

108. Memorandum From the Director of the United States Information Agency (Murrow) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, September 14, 1963.

SUBJECT

World Reaction to Developments in Viet-Nam

Some sympathy for the U.S. dilemma in Viet-Nam has emerged in the last week, particularly in Western Europe, but most comment is still critical of U.S. policies. There is virtually no sympathy for the Diem regime, except in South Korea and the Philippines where officials see Diem as the only available anti-communist bulwark. This applies to some extent to Thailand as well.

De Gaulle's oral intervention² was criticized widely in France except by the papers traditionally supporting him. It drew only limited comment elsewhere.

FAR EAST

The situation in Viet-Nam continues to receive major news play but editorial comment has slackened during past week. Available comment, both media and official, has tended to focus on the question of continued U.S. support for the Diem regime. Reference to the possibility of a neutralized Viet-Nam, as implied by De Gaulle, has been limited. Buddhist groups in Thailand, Burma and Cambodia continue to agitate against GVN treatment of Buddhists. Peking and Hanoi reports now reflect belief that U.S. may eventually replace Diem but that this will not affect the war.

WESTERN EUROPE

Viet-Nam crisis remains the subject of continuing and extensive news coverage and considerable editorial comment in the West European press. Comment has been almost totally critical of the Diem family regime. Though not uncritical of some American moves, the majority of non-Communist papers display considerable sympathy for the U.S. dilemma, and have offered few concrete suggestions for remedies. Recent news

coverage has played up U.S. alleged participation in anti-Diem moves but editorial comment on this subject is not yet available.

NEAR EAST-SOUTH ASIA

Crisis continues receive substantial news play though volume has dwindled somewhat since the wave of reaction following the imposition of martial law and attack on pagodas on August 21. Scattered editorials and backgrounders in media are relentlessly critical of the Diem regime and continue to view its removal as the only answer if the war against the Viet Cong is to be won. Criticism of U.S. policy has softened somewhat, most editorial comment viewing U.S. as faced with necessity of dealing with "difficult and corrupt" regime with which it has little sympathy while responding to the longer range necessity of fighting the Viet Cong. De Gaulle proposal for unification has drawn little attention. Three leading Indian newspapers split sharply, one opposing and two supporting it.

AFRICA

Only light and scattered coverage of Viet-Nam issue. Except for Algeria, very little comment specifically condemns the U.S. Some Africans view South Vietnamese events in terms of Catholic oppression during the Middle Ages. Neutralization of the country is offered as a possible solution in Tunisia's Jeune Afrique.

LATIN AMERICA

South Viet-Nam situation receiving moderate news treatment. Editorial comment scarce. News treatment often appeared under headlines which point up the disagreement between Washington and Saigon.

Conclusion:

Virtually no sympathy or support for Diem regime except as noted above. Some sympathy for U.S. dilemma in Viet-Nam. [I would expect this note of sympathy and understanding to increase unless new and violent acts of suppression occur in South Viet-Nam.]³

I conclude that the degree of the dilemma and the complexity of the issues involved is almost as well understood abroad as it is in Washington!⁴

Edward R. Murrow

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Confidential.

² See [footnote 7, Document 26](#).

³ Brackets in the source text.

⁴ The exclamation point was added by hand, presumably by Murrow.

109. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 15, 1963, noon.

412. Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge. A certain anxiety has been expressed outside the Department on whether it is clear that the operation described in Deptel 243² is definitely in suspense. I am sure you share our understanding that whatever course we may decide on in the next few days, no effort should be made to stimulate coup plotting pending final decisions which are still being formulated here. You may wish to insure that the chiefs of the appropriate US agencies have no different understanding.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, South Vietnam Policy File, August 31 through September 15, 1963. Top Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared by Rusk and Harriman.

² vol. III, p. 628.

110. Memorandum From the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hughes) to the Secretary of State¹

Washington, September 15, 1963.

SUBJECT

The Problem of Nhu

Ngo Dinh Nhu has played a key role in prosecuting the war against the Viet Cong. He has been the dynamic force behind the strategic hamlet program. He has significantly influenced the reorientation of Vietnamese military concepts from conventional to counter-guerrilla warfare. He has developed mass organizations to infuse the youth and others with political consciousness.

Since May 8, however, Nhu has become the primary factor exacerbating the Buddhist controversy and is the cause of a potentially explosive governmental crisis. For the reasons listed below, he is the major obstacle to any genuine resolution of this crisis.

His Hold on Diem

Nhu exercises an overriding, immutable influence over Diem. He has discredited, neutralized, or caused the removal of many competent and loyal advisors to Diem. Nguyen Dinh Thuan, Secretary of State for the Presidency, claims Nhu is the only person whom Diem trusts. Vo Van Hai, chief of Diem's private cabinet and the most reliable authority on the inner workings of the Presidency, agrees with Thuan that Nhu speaks for Diem at meetings, writes Diem's responses to press queries, and has reduced Diem to echoing his own views.

As a result Diem believes Nhu's charge that the Buddhist problem is basically Viet Cong created. This has degraded Diem in the eyes of his loyal supporters. Vu Van Mau, former Foreign Minister, and General Le Van Kim, deputy acting chief of the armed forces, claim Nhu is now the dominant power in South Vietnam. Our Country Team assessment concludes that at top echelons of government as well as among provincial and district officials, the consensus is that actual power rests with Nhu rather than Diem. Moreover the assessment points to the

spreading conviction that Diem is unwilling to dismiss Nhu, with some groups doubting Diem is even able to rule any longer without him.

Nhu's Independent Power: Secret Police and Special Forces

Nhu also has independent sources of power. He directs the secret police and the Can Lao, the semi-covert political control organization. This apparatus of informants permeates bureaucratic, military, and key non-governmental groups. Nhu's surveillance system generates fear and hatred throughout these groups. His power to discredit opponents has led to the removal of competent and dedicated personnel.

Nhu controls the army's Special Forces which, together with the secret police, act as his agents in raids on pagodas, arrests of monks, students, and oppositionists, and the manufacture of "evidence" to "prove" the Communist conspiracy behind these disaffected groups. It is such actions which have exacerbated existing tensions to the point of near revolt.

His Hatred of the United States

Nhu has conducted a virulent public and private anti-American campaign. He has accused the United States of plotting with "colonialists" and "feudalists" to turn South Vietnam into a satellite. He has spread reports that specific United States officials are marked for assassination. He has frequently claimed that the American presence must be reduced because it threatens South Vietnam's independence. He has repeatedly lied to our Ambassador and the CAS station chief concerning his role in developments since May 8.

This has impaired our position in South Vietnam. Colonel Lac, responsible for implementing the strategic hamlet program, claims that progress has slowed in the last three months because of the anti-American attitude of "certain elements" in Saigon. At the same time, Nhu's boast that he commands the basic support of the United States both inhibits his opponents and expands his prestige by humiliating high officials.

His Relations With North Vietnam

Nhu has claimed privately that should United States aid be cut he would seek help elsewhere. Should that fail, Nhu asserts he would negotiate a settlement with Hanoi. Nhu has convinced both Vietnamese and foreign observers that such a prospect is likely. Reports that Nhu is already in contact with Hanoi are so credible and widespread as

eventually to undermine morale in the army and bureaucracy, regardless of their current accuracy.

Nhu is capable of believing he could manipulate the situation to his advantage, whether through fighting or negotiating with the communists. His megalomania is manifest in his claim that only he can save Vietnam. Both Nguyen Dinh Thuan and Vo Van Hai testify to Nhu's opium smoking during the past two years, providing at least partial explanation for his excess of self-confidence and fantasies of power.

The Vietnamese Want Nhu Out

According to General Harkins, both sentiment and reality in South Vietnam have polarized strongly and properly against the Nhus. He believes that the country would "survive and flourish" with them gone and Diem still President. We concur fully in General Harkins' view of the Nhus.

General Krulak reports that Nhu's departure would be hailed by military officers. He was told by the Vietnamese Airborne Brigade Commander of strong dissatisfaction with Nhu. Colonel Lac indicated that Nhu would not last 24 hours if the United States made clear it would not tolerate this situation. Tran Quoc Buu, head of the largest labor organization in Vietnam, claims that his followers believe that Nhu must go. He fears that should Nhu emerge victorious from the present crisis, worse blunders will ensue, permitting an eventual Communist takeover. Vo Van Hai believes that Diem cannot regain the confidence of his people so long as Nhu remains.

We agree with the Country Team assessment that (1) Nhu is disliked, hated, feared, or distrusted at all levels in the bureaucracy, the military establishment and urban elite circles, and (2) long-standing and widespread anti-Nhu feelings have now intensified and crystallized into blame for the regime's repressive measures. We also agree with the MACV assessment that many top level military officers seem convinced that he could deal with Hanoi and the "great bulk of the military cannot accept Nhu as leader of South Vietnam under any conditions".

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Action Plan. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Also published in Declassified

Documents, 1982, 593 A.

111. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 16, 1963, 5 p.m.

523. Eyes only for the Secretary from Lodge. The following should be added to the items proposed for study in paragraphs 10, 11, and 12 of my 478 dated September 11:²

1. In connection with the studies now being made of how to put pressure on the GVN, I hope the fact will be borne in mind that not once since I have been here have I been asked for anything by the GVN. When you consider that the US is spending \$1-1/2 million a day in this country, and that I am the personal representative of the President, it does seem that they ought to be in some doubt at least about a few major items and that they ought to want to curry a little favor with me in order to get these items. The explanation for this curious state of affairs is that they are absolutely sure of our aid and know that it comes along automatically no matter what they do and that I am really not needed.
2. I do not believe that any amount of financial pressure will compel Nhu to leave the country even for so short a time as between now and Christmas. Nor do I think we can use our aid in order to strike a bargain that will cause Madame Nhu to stop talking. But it seems to me a healthy thing for people to feel that they must see the personal representative of the President of the US to get some of the largesse which they hope to get out of the US Government. If they got into the habit of coming to me with requests for favors, it ought to be possible, in the not too distant future, to get them to do at least a few of the things we want them to do.
3. We know that ordinary methods of conversational persuasion have no effect whatever and that even if one makes an impression on Diem at the time, he is immediately brainwashed by his brother later. Presenting him with some unfavorable facts which he can only change by performing an act of some kind is therefore certainly worth trying.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Top Secret; Immediate. Received at 6:19 a.m. and passed to the White House, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and CIA.

² Document 86.

112. Memorandum for the Record of the Daily White House Staff Meeting¹

Washington, September 16, 1963, 8 a.m.

[Here follows discussion of matters unrelated to Vietnam.]

Vietnam. Bundy then turned to Vietnam, saying that judging from the reports, it seemed as if things should be quiet there for the next day or so. Forrestal reported that martial law and censorship had been lifted, and that free elections were scheduled. He added that the practical effects of this were not known.

Bundy then commented on how the Halberstam article in the *Times* yesterday (attached)² laid out positions of the various agencies. He reminded Forrestal that he (Forrestal) had warned that this was coming, but that everyone realized that there was nothing that could be done. Bundy then asked whether it would be useful to have Krulak come up with an analysis of the errors in the article, particularly those parts dealing with the conduct of the war. Bundy added that the reports on the fighting, e.g., number of incidents and wounded, were about the most useful type of evidence he had seen.

Forrestal tried to discourage Bundy from this, saying that CIA had written a companion piece on the last Krulak analysis³ which challenged the DOD version. Bundy said he must not have seen that and asked Forrestal for particulars. Forrestal began to back down a little bit and it turned out that Bundy had seen the CIA piece, whose main import seemed to be that the war in the Delta was not going as well as the war elsewhere and that there were two different kinds of wars.

Someone then introduced the Alsop article in today's *Washington Post* (attached)⁴ which evidently says the war is going fairly well.

About this point in the discussion, Cooper of CIA, in an excited outburst, said that there are not two different kinds of wars in Vietnam, but 7 or 8, depending on who does the reporting, to whom he talks, the time of the year he talks, etc. Bundy summed up by saying that Cooper evidently agreed with him that the situation was very difficult to assess.

Toward the end of the discussion, Bundy said that the removal of martial law and censorship will get the government to the gut issue more quickly with far deeper emotion on both sides.

Judging from the discussion I would say Bundy is not committed to any course of action just now. If anything, he seems more sympathetic to the military viewpoint than I thought. Forrestal tried to be non-committal, but his past actions, as well as those at the table today, put him still squarely on the side of getting rid of Diem. The most surprising thing was Cooper's attitude. To me it indicated more of a split between the CIA and DOD than I, following the evidence at a distance, had been aware of.

[Here follows discussion of matters unrelated to Vietnam.]

¹ Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by W.Y. Smith.

² Not attached. Reference is to David Halberstam's article in The New York Times, September 15, entitled, "U.S. Civilian Aides in Vietnam Press for a Decision on Diem."

³ The CIA companion piece has not been further identified; the Krulak analysis is a reference to a memorandum by Krulak, August 19, analyzing a news report by David Halberstam in The New York Times of August 15. Forrestal gave the Krulak analysis to the President on August 28; see [vol. III, p. 589, footnote 4](#) .

⁴ Reference is to Alsop's "Matter of Fact" column in The Washington Post, September 16. The column was an anecdotal account of a small skirmish in the strategic hamlet of Binh Thanh, near Binh Dai in Kien Hoa Province, which Alsop concluded demonstrated, contrary to popular conception, the Vietnamese masses' will to resist Communism. It was not attached.

113. Memorandum for the Record of a Meeting¹

Washington, September 16, 1963, 11 a.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PRESENT

Secretary Rusk
Secretary McNamara
Secretary Dillon
Mr. Ball
Mr. Gilpatric
General Taylor
Mr. Bundy
Mr. McCone
Governor Harriman
Mr. Bell
Mr. Forrestal
Mr. Hilsman
Mr. Colby
Mr. Janow
Mr. Manning
Mr. Sheldon
Mr. Smith
General Krulak

1. The meeting was preceded by distribution of an up-to-date intelligence roundup by Mr. McCone.²
2. Secretary Rusk opened the meeting by asking if we had any details of what military units had moved out of the capital and what the real significance was. General Taylor replied that we had no definitive information but that we would send an inquiry to General Harkins.
3. Mr. Rusk then asked if there had been any thought given to discussing with the GVN the prospect of getting Tri Quang out of the country rather than releasing him to be a continuing annoyance in Vietnam. Mr. Hilsman said that, to his knowledge, nothing of this sort had been contemplated but that he would suggest it to the Ambassador.
4. Mr. Rusk then asked if there was any basis for real apprehension that students might be going over to the Viet Cong. To this Mr. McCone suggested that the Group might wish to question Mr. Sheldon (from CIA Headquarters) and Mr. Smith (from the CIA Station in Saigon) who had just returned from Saigon this morning. These two individuals were then brought in and the Group questioned them as follows:

a.

From Mr. McCone. Do you believe that the dissident students are going over to the Viet Cong?

Reply. Three schools in Saigon have probably been infiltrated by the Viet Cong. This is something that has been known for some time. The general impression is that some Saigon students have defected to the Viet Cong; the number is not large-not exceeding 30.

b.

From Mr. McCone. How many students remain in custody?

Reply. Less than 200 students remain in custody-100 of these are in jail, 100 in the armed services. The arrest of students was widespread and extended to almost anyone involved with the Lycee or the university. Release, in most cases, was prompt.

c.

From Mr. Rusk. Is there, in fact, a difference in view among our various officials in Saigon?

Reply. Yes, there is, except in the U.S. military.

d.

From General Taylor. What are your views on the Sheehan and Halberstam articles in the Sunday papers?³

Reply. There is some truth in the allegations. This sort of thing finds its way into the paper because everything in Saigon gets leaked by our own people.

e.

From Mr. Rusk. How does Nhu go about creating the atmosphere that he enjoys full U.S. support?

Reply. He gives lectures; and he conveys the idea of the Special Forces, the Can Lao, the Republican Youth, and the Women's Solidarity Movement.

f.

From Mr. Rusk. Is there still coup talk on the Vietnamese side?

Reply. Yes. Various Vietnamese officials and employees come to CIA with coup ideas all the time. It is mostly talk because the key is the loyalty of the military units, and there is little assurance in this area. Some of the coup talkers speak of having acquired loyalty from junior officers and some units in the Saigon area, but there are no specifics.

g.

From Mr. Hilsman. Do you have any views as to the reports that Nhu is an opium smoker?

Reply. The rumor has been current for some years, but it is not believed.

h.

From Mr. Rusk. Does any of the U.S. representation believe that we can make a success of the present endeavor with the Diem government totally unchanged?

Reply. No one is known to hold this view in the Embassy, at CIA, USIS or USOM.

i.

From Mr. McCone (referring to a cable which had come in from Sheldon).⁴ What are the general ideas which underlie current coup planning?

Reply. They generally pivot around the thought of a quick, violent attack on the Palace, assassination and then hope for subsequent substantive action by the generals. The substance which they all lack is a comprehensive follow-on plan.

j. *From Mr. Rusk.* Do you agree that the coup planners are hopeful that, if they can cause the initial crisis, the U.S. will do the rest? The question was not answered.

k.

From Mr. Rusk. What are your views regarding the rumors concerning possible gestures in the direction of the DRV?

Mr. Sheldon offered, as a hypothesis, that Nhu is extremely wise; that if we corner him and he has no hope of maintaining his influence in any other way he will go to Moscow—probably via Yugoslavia—to propose that the Soviets and French take over our commitments. The compensation would be in terms of U.S. withdrawal and the possibility of a Soviet presence. To this Governor Harriman commented that the Russians would really be getting little out of the arrangement, since we would remove ourselves in any case, as soon as the Viet Cong stopped attacking the GVN.

5. The meeting then turned to the papers which had been distributed over the week-end.⁵ Mr. Hilsman made a brief distribution of two general lines of action, one involving conciliation; one involving pressures. He was emphatic in his statement that we should be prepared to reverse our course at any time in the event that we achieved some degree of success. The papers were not discussed in detail.
6. Secretary Rusk stated that a cable of instructions would have to be drafted quickly for the Ambassador in order for him to get an accurate view of Washington level reactions.
7. Mr. McNamara proposed that the paper embodying a conciliatory program be taken as a basis;⁶ that an appraisal of the situation at large, as seen here, be developed; that it be followed by the elements of the conciliatory approach; that we include the Presidential letter; that we realize that a conciliatory approach may not succeed, in which case further steps may have to be taken; and finally that the Ambassador's views on all the above be solicited.
8. The general meeting was then terminated, followed by a brief session including the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Mr. Bundy. General Taylor described the session as the occasion for Mr. Rusk to say that he preferred the conciliatory rather than the pressure approach, and that a cable embodying these thoughts would be drafted for consideration by the President.
9. Subsequently, I discussed events with Mr. Hilsman, who advised me that he had been directed by Secretary Rusk to prepare two cables;⁷ one conveying a conciliatory approach, and one conveying the suasion and pressure approach, stating that these would be taken up with the President in a meeting, probably tomorrow.

V.H. Krulak
Major General, USMC

¹ Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-647-71. Top Secret; Sensitive. Drafted by Krulak. The meeting was held at the Department of State.

² Not found.

³ Reference is to Neil Sheehan's front-page article in The Washington Post, September 15, entitled "U.S. Acts To End Dispute Among Its Viet Missions," and David Halberstam's The New York Times article of the same date; see [footnote 2, Document 112](#).

⁴ Not further identified.

⁵ Reference is to two papers drafted by Hilsman, Monday, September 16, but first prepared on September 11, entitled, "Reconciliation with Rehabilitated GVN" and "Pressure Plan." Copies are in the Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda, Meetings on Vietnam (without annexes), and *ibid.*, Vietnam Country Series, Action Plan (with three annexes). The first annex is a Department of Defense memorandum, September 11, entitled "Implication of Partial Cessation of US Military Aid Upon the Military Campaign in the Republic of Vietnam" plus tabs. This document is published in *Declassified Documents*, 1982, 466 A. The second annex is a list of AID programs and a chart detailing them and the probable effects on Vietnam if they were suspended; neither is printed. The third annex is a copy of [Document 110](#).

Apparently advance versions of these papers were sent to the President by Forrestal on September 15. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous, Part II)

⁶ Copies of the paper, "Reconciliation With a Rehabilitated GVN," were given to McNamara, Gilpatric, and Taylor, all of whom made written comments on them. McNamara's and Taylor's copies are at the National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-186-69, and Gilpatric's copy is at the Washington Federal Records Center, McNamara Papers: FRC 31-A-3470, Viet Sensitive.

⁷ These cables, which are similar in substance to Hilsman's papers, are printed as attachments to [Document 114](#).

114. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State
for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) to the Secretary of
State¹

Washington, September 16, 1963.

SUBJECT
Viet-Nam

Attached are two cables—one on the “Reconciliation Track” and one on the “Pressures and Persuasion Track.”

I think it is important to note that these are true alternatives—i.e., the “Reconciliation Track” is not the same as Phase I of the “Pressures and Persuasion Track.” The difference is in public posture. Phase I of the “Pressures and Persuasion Track” continues to maintain a public posture of disapproval of the GVN's policies of repression. The “Reconciliation Track” requires a public posture of acquiescence in what the GVN has recently done, and even some effort by the US to put these recent actions in as good a light as we possibly can.

If this distinction, which is a real one, is preserved, then it seems to me clear that it will not be possible to switch from the “Reconciliation Track” to a “Pressures and Persuasion Track” if the former does not work—except in the event that Diem and Nhu provide us with another dramatic act of repression as an excuse. On the other hand, it will be possible to switch from a “Pressures and Persuasion Track” to a “Reconciliation Track” at any time during Phases I and II of the “Pressures and Persuasion Track,” although probably not after we had entered Phases III and IV.

My own judgment is that the “Reconciliation Track” will not work. I think that Nhu has already decided on an adventure. I think he feels that the progress already made in the war and the US materiel on hand gives him freedom to launch on a course that has a minimum and a maximum goal. The minimum goal would be sharply to reduce the American presence in those key positions which have political significance in the provinces and the strategic hamlet program and to avoid any meaningful concessions that would go against his Mandarin, “personalist” vision of the future of Viet-Nam. The maximum goal I would think, would be a deal with North Viet-Nam for a truce in the

war, a complete removal of the US presence, and a “neutralist” or “Titoist” but still separate South Viet-Nam.

At the same time, I would give Phases I and II of the “Pressures and Persuasion Track” only a fair chance of success, and I think that Phases III and IV will create a situation over which we would have little if any control, at least if they were launched in the immediate future.

Thus, I would recommend adopting as our initial course Phases I and II of the “Pressures and Persuasion Track” testing and probing as we go along and being ready to switch to “Reconciliation” at any moment that it becomes necessary, using the decision to switch as a means of getting at least nominal concessions in order to save as much of our face as possible.

I make this recommendation with the caveat that we do not have sufficient information to make a final and complete judgment on either of the two key issues—where Nhu will lead Viet-Nam if he remains in power and whether or not enough people will continue to fight the Viet Cong to bring victory.

The trouble is the necessary information for a final judgment on these two key issues is simply not available. Nor is anyone likely to acquire it before we make a fundamental decision. This is not an unfamiliar dilemma in the making of foreign policy. At such a time governments perforce operate on informed hunch, hoping only that the hunch they use is the best one available.

But I also think that at such a time governments must not even attempt to make final judgments or to take irreversible actions, but to proceed by incremental steps. It is for this reason that I would reject both “Reconciliation” and Phases III and IV—at least at this time.

[Attachment 1]

Draft Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam²

Eyes only Lodge. Approved Action Plan for Viet-Nam is outlined below. You should proceed to implement at once.

Our analysis of the situation is as follows: Diem and Nhu are well entrenched and will resist changes stubbornly. Ultimate sanction of

cutting aid thus runs risk of forcing them into a corner where their choices will be between capitulation and departure of whole family, and showdown and either Gotterdammerung or a deal with the DRV, with latter more likely.

We are therefore faced with problem not only of reconciliation with GVN but of obtaining sufficient popular support for the Diem-Nhu government to enable it to win the war. The central problem will still be Nhu—his position as political symbol to the disaffected, his philosophy and concept of the State, his conviction that Americans in positions we deem essential are an obstacle to achieving his goal, and his possible machinations with the DRV.

Within Viet-Nam the major target of rehabilitation effort must be the urban elite. Ensuring their support will require credible reforms, which will in turn help to improve the GVN image abroad.

Approach

You should institute dialogue with Diem against background of current internal US and external world pressure for reform in GVN. Basis of conversation is Presidential letter forwarded via immediately following cable. Tone should be persuasion combined with sympathy and understanding. Major inducement will be U.S. official statements designed to restore Diem and GVN image at home and abroad (see Public Posture below). Probably wise to have someone like Lansdale assist you through long-standing personal friendship with Diem.

You should say that the programs thus far followed to win the war have been sound and generally successful but have lagged in that they did not take sufficient account of the aspirations of the leading elements primarily in the main urban centers but also in cities at the provincial and district levels. Their support vital to arrest present deterioration.

Political opposition as expressed in the Buddhist movement was not caused by Communist subversion but by the absence of a feeling of stake and participation in the Government and its programs on the part of these leading elements.

Program

Following are major topics you should plan to cover with Diem: a)
Family—Diem should think deeply and sincerely about the role of

members of his family, not only Nhu and Madame Nhu but also Thuc and Can. He should consider making their role more open and less susceptible to charges they are conspiratorial and therefore nefarious in their activities.

b) *Party*—Can Lao party should not be covert or semi-covert but a broad association of supporters engaged in a common, winning cause. This could perhaps be best accomplished by disbanding the party and starting afresh.

c) *Elections*—These should be held, should be free, and should be widely observed. Candidate lists should be reopened and members of the opposition should be allowed full and free participation. They should and can be defeated in a free battle.

d) *Assembly*—Assembly should be convoked, if necessary in extraordinary session. The Government should submit its policies to it and should receive its confidence. An Assembly resolution would be most useful for external image purposes.

e) *Normalcy*—Diem should get everyone back to work and get them to focus on winning the war. He should be broadminded and compassionate in his attitude toward those who have, for understandable reasons, found it difficult under recent circumstances fully to support him.

A real spirit of reconciliation could work wonders on the people he heads; a punitive, harsh or autocratic attitude could only lead to further resistance.

f) *Press*—The press should be allowed full latitude of expression. Diem will be criticized, but leniency and cooperation with the domestic and foreign press at this time would bring praise for his leadership in due course.

g) *Buddhists and Students*—Let them out and leave them unmolested. This more than anything else would demonstrate the return of a better day and the refocussing on the main job at hand, the war.

h) *Secret and Combat Police*—Keep its role to a minimum and as circumspect as possible, thereby indicating clearly that a period of reconciliation and political stability has returned.

Following are additional specific remedial actions you should bring up with Diem as appropriate:

- a. A repeal or suitable amendment Decree 10.
- b. Rehabilitation by ARVN of pagodas.
- c. General Association of Buddhists to publish history of Buddhist agitation, naming those who subverted it into political vehicle to overthrow Diem.
- d. Establishment of Ministry of Religious Affairs.
- e. Liberation of passport issuances and currency restrictions enabling all to leave who wish to.
- f. Offer of 1000 student scholarships in US permitting departure of inimical elements.
- g. Cabinet changes to inject new untainted blood, remove targets of popular discontent.
- h. Acceptance of Buddhist Inquiry Mission from World Federation to report true facts of situation to world.

Public Posture

Concurrently, the Department will undertake to:

- a. Work in the UN to blunt the debate in the UN on the resolution condemning GVN for human rights violation.
- b. Prepare White Paper placing recent events in perspective, noting essential political character of Buddhist agitation, that only small numbers of pagodas occupied by force and violence, and that Buddhist religion never really seriously interfered with as far as majority Vietnamese concerned.
- c. Present this privately before publication to key members of Congress.
- d. Announce lifting of travel ban to SVN in view of "reestablishment of situation".
- e. Publicize with appropriate indications of approval each step taken by GVN towards better image.

[Attachment 2]

Draft Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam³

Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge. Exclusive for Admiral Felt. Saigon's 478.⁴ Action Plan for Viet-Nam is outlined below. Phases 1 and 2 approved at highest level, and you should proceed to progressive

implementation. Washington decision will not be taken on further phases which add increasing pressures, until we see results of actions under Phases 1 and 2.

Part I, Objective and Concept.

Objective. Our overall objective in South Viet-Nam is to win war against Viet Cong. Recent repressive actions of GVN have created disaffection which will inevitably affect war effort unless GVN undertakes changes in both policies and personnel that are effective and credible.

While withdrawal by US would be immediately disastrous to war effort, acquiescence by US in recent GVN actions would be equally disastrous, although less immediately so. We therefore propose follow policy of persuasion coupled with pressure on GVN aimed at inducing it to take actions which will insure sufficient popular support to win war against Viet Cong. This policy should be implemented in such a way as to avoid triggering either civil violence or radical move by GVN to make deal with DRV and remove US presence.

Actions by GVN. Check list of desired GVN actions to ensure popular support necessary to win war are divided into two categories: (A) actions designed to reverse recent policies of repression, and (B) actions essential to set psychological tone and image which will make category A actions effective and credible.

Category A Actions:

1. Release and freedom from pursuit of all those recently arrested, except only those who have indubitably engaged in subversive action.
2. Announcement that Vice President Tho is designated to negotiate with a legitimate reconstituted Intersect Committee of Buddhists, these negotiations to lead to joint statement of reconciliation.
3. Effective revocation of martial law.
4. Removal of all censorship.
5. Scheduling of a definite date for holding of new National Assembly elections; reopening of list of candidates and guarantee that elections will be free.
6. Convocation of extraordinary session of National Assembly to announce actions above.

Category B Actions:

1. Diem's government should be reorganized and broadened to include respected individuals such as Tran Quoc Buu and Pham Huy Quat, with one or two posts given to senior generals such as Big Minh and Kim and with a recall to public service of one or two individuals who have left Vietnam, such as Vu Van Maul
2. Since Nhu and Madame Nhu symbolize to world and to important Vietnamese opinion GVN policies of repression, Nhus' power must be terminated in order to lend credibility to statements of policy changes and assure a fresh start. This requires their departure from Vietnam, at least for extended vacation.

Need to set psychological tone and image is paramount. Diem has taken positive actions in past of greater or less scope than those contemplated in Category A but which have had little practical political effect. Diem has already taken many of steps in Category A but in such a way as to make them hollow or, even if real, unbelievable (e.g., martial law already nominally lifted, assembly elections scheduled, and puppet bonzes established).

Thus specific "reforms" are apt to have little impact without dramatic, symbolic move which convinces Vietnamese that reforms are real. As practical matter this can only be achieved by some visible reduction in influence of Nhus, who are—justifiably or not—symbol to disaffected of all that they detest in GVN.

Even though it not our intention remove Diem, Ngo family may so resist reversal of policies and removal of Nhus as to make Diem's removal inevitable. If so, our goal should be so to structure situation that Diem has option of staying without his brother or retiring of his own free will.

We recognize possibility this campaign may also result in resumed coup plotting. We propose to give no encouragement to such activities at this time, although we remain ready to listen to serious approaches.

Part II, Phase 1.

1. Phase 1 concentrates on suasion by a continuation of your conversations with Diem on problem of US-GVN relations in all its ramifications. Although past experience does not lead us to be hopeful that suasion alone will accomplish desired results, it seems essential to make attempt if only to establish a record and lay groundwork for Phase 2.

2. You should present to President Diem Presidential letter⁵ forwarded via immediately following cable.
3. In presenting Presidential letter it is suggested that you review situation along following lines:

Since your last meeting with Diem USG has been faced with crisis of confidence in Vietnamese Government on part of American public and more particularly Congress. Diem is undoubtedly aware of increasing tempo of criticism of his government appearing in all sectors of US press without regard to geographic location. In addition, he is aware of movement in US Congress, exemplified by Church resolution, which if unchecked could result in Congressional action to cut off all aid to Vietnam.

Another factor must be borne in mind, and that is world opinion. This too has been universally condemnatory of regime and its recent policies of repression. This will inevitably be manifested dramatically in General Assembly when present resolution on Buddhist question is debated. US and other friendly nations who are aiding Vietnam will find it politically difficult support GVN in UN under present circumstances. US cannot control world opinion, but as leader of free world its attitudes carry great deal of influence. If US, major support of South Vietnam, has its confidence in GVN restored, this will have favorable effect on attitudes shown by other nations.

In order to preserve aid program to South Vietnam, which President sincerely desires to do, he has written President Diem personal letter urging him to take steps necessary to permit USG to meet criticisms of its people and Congress and continue assisting Vietnamese war effort.

4. We believe you should also reiterate to Diem actions (see checklist above) which US considers desirable for him to take to counter US and world criticisms and enable us to continue cooperate with him.
5. In this phase we hereby authorize limited, voluntary evacuation of American dependents. Separate cable being forwarded on implementing instructions.

Part III, Phase 2.

- 1.

Concept.

In this phase we add selective cuts in aid which will have least effect on war effort as pressures in your continuing conversations with Diem.

Tone of your conversations should continue be that US purpose is to preserve aid program to SVN, which President desires to do. Regretfully, however, has become politically necessary take certain actions convince US public and Congress we supporting only those GVN efforts with which we agree, i.e., fight against Viet Cong. Otherwise, Congress may cut off all aid.

We notify Diem of these actions with great reluctance and wish assure him we will attempt continue or redirect aid for programs essential to war effort as this can be worked out. If Diem can take dramatic actions we requesting promptly, we feel we can quickly restore conditions but we may have make further cuts, again in order avoid total cut of aid.

2.

Actions.

Your Approach to Diem.

In context of above, you should inform Diem that in light of unsatisfactory response to your (Phase 1) effort at persuasion, USG has now instructed you review for him actions relating our programs Viet-Nam which have now, or recently, been taken.

- A. We are not moving ahead with decisions on major AID actions, such as negotiation of \$33 million additional new PL-480 sales agreement, \$5 million in September allotments for the Commercial Import Program (CIP), \$5.5 million in releases for licenses of July-August CIP allotments, and the approval of certain new contracts.
- B. We will withhold our support from organs of GVN which have been supporting policies of repression, and will specifically withhold additional supplies and equipment from certain operations and elements of the combat police and DGI and ARVN PsyWar.
- C. We will require written guarantees that AID provided equipment will not be used in acts against non-Communist political or religious groups from any GVN agency likely to be involved in such acts.

- D. We have given instructions to Mr. John Richardson to suspend immediately payments to all projects serving the current politically repressive activities. Projects not serving those activities may continue to be supported by payments directly to project officers, provided the projects are in our mutual best interest.
- E. The Executive Branch considers any effort to contest moves in Congress to restrict or terminate U.S. aid programs in Viet-Nam bound to be ineffective under present circumstances.
- F. The US did not oppose the inscription of an item proposed in the United Nations General Assembly censoring the violation of human rights in Viet-Nam, and will not be in a position, due to the state of domestic opinion in the US, to oppose its adoption by the General Assembly unless a radical improvement in the situation in Viet-Nam occurs.
- G. Reluctantly the United States has decided that the unsettled conditions in South Viet-Nam require us to evacuate all American dependents.
- H. USOM and USIS/Saigon will withhold additional supplies and equipment now being delivered in Saigon from those operations and elements of the Combat Police and ARVN PsyWar and Director General of Information which have been used in support of policies of repression.

Background on AID Actions Above.

Following is provided for your background information on AID aspect of your approach to Diem above, and may at your discretion be communicated to Diem during your conversations.

In recent weeks AID has already been delaying:

- A. Issuance of Procurement Authorization on \$5.5 million in Supporting Assistance/Commercial Import Program (CIP) funds allotted to Mission in July-August but not yet obligated to GVN.
- B. Allotment of approximately \$5 million to Mission for September issuance of Procurement Authorizations for Commercial Import Program.
- C. Amendment of current PL-480 agreement adding \$2.9 million in sweetened condensed milk.
- D. Negotiation of new PL-480 agreement covering roughly CY 1964 for about \$33 million in cotton, flour, condensed milk and tobacco.
- E. Approval of major contracts expected to be presented shortly under loan projects including Saigon-Cholon waterworks (treatment plant \$9

million) and Saigon Electric Power (\$4 million).

Disclosure of Your Approach.

You should not immediately announce publicly the content of your approach to Diem and the actions taken. You should obtain Diem's reaction on later visits. During your approach, however, you should inform Diem that at some stage White House must announce general nature of actions taken by USG. You should tell Diem that you have authority to recommend to Washington timing of this announcement.

Should we move into this phase (Phase 2), you have discretionary authority to inform certain key Vietnamese, to be selected by you, in confidence about your approach to Diem immediately after it has been made.

Undisclosed Actions.

Begin FYI. In this phase we would immediately institute following other actions which should not be revealed to Diem himself but which would rapidly become apparent.

- A. Acquisition of substantial cash resources in plasters, in preparation for direct support by-passing Saigon.
- B. On same day or about same time as your approach to Diem, Richardson and certain his officers would indicate to Colonel Tung and selected Vietnamese officers and officials suspension of payments to those projects serving current repressive activities. Burden of CAS statements would be along following lines: "Ambassador has instructed Richardson and staff cease certain payments on instruction received from highest levels in Washington. Reason for suspension of aid to certain programs is that USG cannot condone actions of repression on part GVN and cannot for one moment support such activities."
- C. At your discretion, Chief of Station might talk directly to Ngo Dinh Nhu with view persuade him to depart. End FYI.

Additional Actions.

Additional measures which may be taken in Phase 2 at your discretion:

- A. Demand by USOM Director for return, or refund, of trucks and other equipment used by police in raids on pagodas and schools.

- B. Withholding of participation in hamlet militia leaders training program so long as it is directed by Colonel Tung.
- C.

Withhold quarterly release 25 million plasters due shortly to Department Defense PsyWar for their publications pending positive indication these funds will not be used to support policy of repression against Buddhists and students or other non-Communist groups or to publicize Nhus favorably.⁶

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous, Part 11. Top Secret; Eyes Only. There is no drafting information on the source text, but the memorandum was drafted by Hilsman with the assistance of officers in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs. (Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 506; Department of State, Office of the Historian, *Vietnam Interviews*, Roger Hilsman, May 15, 1984) A handwritten note on the source text indicates that the attached cables had been revised.

² Top Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and others. To be repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD exclusive for Admiral Felt.

³ Top Secret; Immediate. To be repeated to CINCPAC POLAD.

⁴ Document 86.

⁵ *Infra*.

⁶ In Hilsman's draft paper of September 16 for persuasion and pressure against the Diem regime, there were distinct Phases 3 and 4 of Part III. Phase 3 in the September 16 paper has been incorporated into this cable in revised form as Part III, Phase 2. Phase 4 has been dropped. The substantive portion of Phase 4 in Hilsman's draft paper of September 16 reads as follows:

"It appears that if Diem has refused to accept US demands in the face of Phase 3 actions, there is no alternative but to announce (publicly or privately) complete disassociation with the Diem regime. Such an announcement should reassert US desires to continue support of the Vietnamese people in their fight for freedom, and to indicate US willingness to support an alternative regime—either in Saigon or elsewhere in Viet-Nam. [Here follows a listing of actions to accompany such an announcement.] If the US correctly has estimated civil and military readiness to overthrow Diem, an alternate government should

emerge with sufficient popular support to carry on the fight against the Viet Cong while coping with Diem, if he remains in the Saigon area. If the US has not correctly assessed the readiness of the military to desert Diem and he, in fact, retains control of most major forces, the US would face the final decision of US military intervention or complete withdrawal from Viet-Nam. In this situation, US military intervention to fight a former ally could serve no useful purpose, since there would not exist a sufficient popular base of support of US objectives. Inherent in all Phase 4 activities is the element of extreme danger to US essential personnel remaining in Viet-Nam. Casualties should be expected, particularly in the event there is no popular abandonment of Diem." (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda, Meetings on Vietnam)

115. Draft Letter From President Kennedy to President Diem¹

Washington, September 16, 1963.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: 1. I am sending you this letter because of the gravity of the situation which now confronts our two countries, in their relations with each other. For us in the United States, difficult and painful decisions cannot long be deferred, and I know that you on your side have problems of similar gravity. Moreover, it is clear to me as I work on this matter that many of its difficulties arise from problems in assessing the real facts of the situation. Both of our Governments, for different reasons, face great difficulties on this score. And so I think it may be important and helpful for you to know accurately just how the situation appears to me. In return, I shall greatly value the most candid expression of your own assessment, and it may well be that you and I between us can work out a new understanding in place of the present troubled, confused and dangerous relationship between our Governments.

2. At the outset, let me state plainly that the central purpose of my Government in all of its relations with your country is that the Communists should be defeated in their brazen effort to capture your country by force and fraud of all varieties. What we do and do not do, whether it seems right or wrong to our friends, is always animated by this central purpose. In all that it does in its relations with your country, the United States Government gives absolute priority to the defeat of the Communists.

3. This purpose, in a general way, has been a part of American policy toward your country for many years, but as you know it took a new shape and clarity at the end of 1961. At that time, in light of the very unsatisfactory situation in Laos, and in view of the increasing efforts then being made by the Viet Cong, I sent two of my most trusted associates on a careful mission of inquiry to your country. The mission of General Taylor and Mr. Rostow was to give me the best possible judgment of the course of the struggle in South Vietnam and the prospect of success. Their comprehensive report² convinced me, first, that the situation was indeed very serious, and, second, that by appropriate and determined action your Government and ours together could find a way to victory. Our two Governments then worked out together, and

you and I as their leaders formally approved, a new level of effort and cooperation. And I think it is fair to say that both our Governments have been loyal to that effort, to the limit of their abilities, ever since.

4. By the hardest kind of joint effort, in which of course your people have borne the heavier and more immediate responsibility, the contest against the Communists in the last year and a half has gradually but steadily fumed in our favor. New levels of alertness and skill were developed in the forces of your country, and the bold and imaginative program of strategic hamlets was pressed forward with steadily increasing energy and speed. Each of us, I know, pays close attention to our reports from all over the country on the course of the struggle against the Viet Cong, and I am sure that these reports agree on the basic proposition that the war has been going well, at least until very recently. And since newspaper reports and the problem of the press generally are an important element of difficulty in our relations, it is only fair for me to say that I have been as much irritated as I am sure you must have been, by inaccurate press reports, which tend to disparage unfairly the effectiveness of our joint effort against the Viet Cong.

5. A great cooperative venture of the kind in which we have been engaged is never easy for the representatives of separate sovereign states. On the one hand, the struggle is Vietnamese at its center, not American. You and your Government have responsibilities, as Vietnamese to Vietnam, which are inevitably different from those which I and my Government have as Americans to America. At the point of immediate battle, when one of our pilots or advisors is in the same danger as your soldiers, these lines of division tend to fade and even disappear, but further back the differences are real and not wholly avoidable. I have read with interest cables from Ambassador Nolting in which he has reported your own awareness of this difficulty and your deep concern with it. I want you to know that I too see this problem. In particular, I recognize that it must be a matter of real difficulty for members of your Government to find large numbers of Americans holding positions of considerable responsibility and authority in matters which are of great and immediate importance to the people of Vietnam. I well understand your insistence upon avoiding, in our relations, anything that might instill in your people a colonial spirit of acceptance of foreign domination. In this regard, I want you to know that I have personally assured myself that the top American personnel, in every department and agency concerned, fully understand my determination that Americans in Vietnam shall act in full respect for the independence of

your country and for the proper determination of your people to be free of domination even by their friends. At the same time, as you know, we cannot avoid the necessity for extensive participation by our representatives in a situation in which our own resources, and thousands of members of our armed forces, are so heavily committed. I have been grateful for your ability to understand and respect our necessities, just as I have tried to respect yours.

6. In the last four months, by a series of events which neither you nor I can have wished and whose impact is surely a matter of equal regret to us both, a new and grave set of difficulties has been created for us both. It is not my purpose here to recount in detail events with which you yourself are familiar, nor even to repeat expressions of concern, which you have heard many times from Ambassador Nolting and Ambassador Lodge, on the existing situation and dangers within your country.

7. It may well be your view that American opinion has been misled on these recent events, and I recognize that this is always a possibility in a world in which the accurate judgment of distant happenings is very difficult. But that leads me to urge upon you as strongly as I can that the only way to correct this difficulty is to allow more and not less reporting by Americans in your country. If there is one principle upon which my people are united, by Constitutional commitment, conviction, and tradition, it is that the way to get at the truth is to let people see for themselves. At present, acting on feelings which are understandable, and working from a tradition quite different from our own, your Government is engaged in a limitation and censorship of news, and in a harassment of reporters, which can only have—and is having—the most destructive effects upon confidence between our two peoples. I repeat that I well understand the irritation which tendentious reporting can cause, but I cannot overemphasize to you the damage which is done to your own cause and to our common purpose by limitations of this sort. No single step would do more to reopen the path to effective cooperation than an immediate and complete abandonment of all restrictions upon the flow of news to and from our countries.

8. I must stress, however, that effective cooperation does not depend solely on a freer flow of truthful information. It is a fact, as I found it necessary to say publicly two weeks ago,³ that we in our Government are gravely troubled by the danger that some of the methods used by some members of your Government may be creating a situation in which it will not be possible to sustain public support in Vietnam for the struggle against the Communists. You will feel, I am sure, that you have

a right to your own judgment on this matter, and it is not likely that in a single message from this distance I can change your mind. What I must do, however, is to make clear the effect of recent events upon the situation here in the United States and upon the possibilities of action open to me.

9. At the present time it is a fact that unless there can be important changes and improvements in the apparent relation between the Government and the people in your country, opinion here, in the public and in the Congress, will make it impossible for me to continue without change the great cooperative programs which we have been pressing for since 1961. I have said publicly that we do not wish to cut off our aid programs at this time, and I shall not change this position except as such change becomes necessary in response to public opinion and the democratic processes of this country. But it would be wrong for me not to let you know that such change is inevitable unless the situation in Vietnam can somehow take a major turn for the better.

10. At a minimum, and within a short period of time, it will become necessary for this Government to take actions which make it clear that American cooperation and American assistance will not be given to or through individuals whose acts and words seem to run against the purpose of genuine reconciliation and unified national effort against the Communists. This is so because without such limitations and modifications it will become impossible for us to keep on with our major effort in support of your country. Unless I can show the American people that the United States is wholly dissociated from acts which have raised grave questions here, I clearly can not sustain public support for the central effort.

11. There is much more that needs to be talked out between our two countries on these grave matters. I am asking Ambassador Lodge, as my personal representative, to express my views to you in frankness and candor and to be at your disposal for further discussion. What Ambassador Lodge says to you has my explicit authorization and approval. Of course I shall also warmly welcome a direct expression of your personal views in a message to me at any time. I do not suppose that when two independent nations reach a grave level of disagreement the fault can ever lie on one side only, and you will not find us rigid or unresponsive in the effort to reestablish and to sustain in the future the cooperation which has, until lately, had such strikingly effective results. I repeat that it remains the central purpose of the United States in its friendly relation with South Vietnam to defeat the aggressive designs of

the Communists. But I must also repeat that this purpose can only be achieved if steps are taken to remove the obstacles that have so seriously and regrettably impaired our cooperative effort.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous, Part II. Top Secret; Eyes Only. There is no drafting information on the source text, but this letter was prepared by Hilsman and others at the Department of State. The source text is labeled: "Suggested Draft of Presidential Letter, Adapted to Phase 1 of This Plan."

² For the report and related documents, see [vol. I, pp. 477](#) ff.

³ See [Document 50](#).

116. Memorandum From Michael V. Forrestal of the
National Security Council Staff to the President's Special
Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, September 16, 1963.

SUBJECT
South Vietnam

I am trying this memorandum mainly as an exercise in relieving some of my own frustrations.

I think we have come to a position of stall in our attempts to develop a Washington consensus. For a week now the fundamental attitudes of the principal officers of the Government have remained unchanged. The reason for this is, I think, two-fold. First, the nature of the problem itself tends to force the basic political outlooks within the President's official family to the surface. On the one hand, Averell sees a world in which the only successful way to resist the Communist menace is to provide the people concerned with an alternative worth fighting for. On the other hand, to Bob McNamara the issue is more than mechanical: if enough of the enemy can be identified and killed by methods his department has been so successful in developing, there will be time to concentrate on the political and social welfare of the people in the countries where insurgency exists. Each fundamentally views the other's position as an impractical one.

Because of this difference in world views, I do not see how the development of any further information is going to change conclusions. This leads me to the conclusion that the governmental situation here requires Presidential guidance. I am sure that there is a sufficiently large reserve of loyal acquiescence in the official family to permit the President to make a free choice on fundamental policy, but I am equally sure that as time goes by and positions continue to harden, a Presidential decision will become more painful.

Two other thoughts prompt me to hope for early Presidential action. The first is that the longer we continue in an attitude of semipublic fluidity, the worse the leak problem becomes. Until there is a policy behind which to close ranks, the human tendency to influence decision by every means at one's disposal will continue. My second thought is a corollary to the

first. General Krulak has just called me to complain that our instruction to the field² to hold off major aid decisions is, in his view, a back drawer way of effecting a policy which has not yet been agreed upon. As time passes, General Krulak's point will become more valid and emotions will start to rise again.

If the President is inclined to grasp the nettle, I have a thought on the way he might do it. On the assumption that his political guidance will be to the effect that we must attempt to bring about the changes in policy and personnel which would restore to the GVN a fuller measure of its people's support, the President might direct that the first phase of Roger's "pressure plan" be put into effect immediately. The President might observe that, as a practical matter, the first phase is almost parallel to the "policy of reconciliation" which Bob McNamara calls "Track 1". The significant difference is the political tone which the U.S. adopts during this first phase. Instead of embracing the GVN and trying to endorse its public image, we maintain the current public atmosphere of disapproval and tension. In short, I am suggesting that the President approve a mechanical course which I think would be acceptable to Bob McNamara while at the same time setting a political tone which would be unacceptable but on which, I think, the Secretary of Defense would quickly and sincerely defer to the President's judgment. This might best be done by direct conversation between the President and the Secretaries of State and Defense. Of course we will inevitably have to face the problems implicit in phases 2, 3, etc.; but once the political direction has been set, we can get back to the more logical and less emotional business of analyzing our own actions in the light of their intrinsic value as tools to accomplish our purpose.

Two items of incidental intelligence: Roger tells me that he believes the Secretary of State is waiting for the President to give a signal and is also very concerned (I think rightly) about Ambassador Lodge's opinion. I also have just had a talk with Greg Henderson, political officer in Korea. He confirms very strongly that the Korean Government is watching us in South Vietnam with great care. The Government-controlled press in Seoul is advising us to stay out of internal affairs in Vietnam and in Korea and to eschew aid as a means of influencing political development in both countries.

Mike

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous, Part 11. Top Secret, Eyes Only.

² Document 97.

117. Editorial Note

On September 16, 1963, David Halberstam reported in *The New York Times* that there were basic disagreements between the United States and South Vietnam over the strategic hamlet program in the Camau peninsula, and to a lesser extent, in the Mekong Delta. In an article entitled, "Rift With Saigon on War Tactics Underlined by 2 Red Attacks," Halberstam wrote that U.S. officials in Vietnam were becoming increasingly concerned about the vulnerability of isolated strategic hamlets in areas so long dominated by the Viet Cong, and they reportedly called for an immediate halt of construction of additional hamlets there. Halberstam claimed that the Vietnamese Government was resisting U.S. pressure to consolidate in the peninsula and the Delta and wished to continue to construct small hamlets.

President Kennedy read this article and sent the following short memorandum to Robert McNamara on September 16: "How accurate is this story[?] Is there a split between our military and the Vietnamese on the strategic hamlets in this area[?]" (Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 69 A 3131, Vietnam-1)

118. Memorandum of Conversation Between the Director of the Vietnam Working Group (Kattenburg) and Madame Tran Van Chuong¹

Washington, September 16, 1963, 8 p.m.

Madame Chuong called me several times during the day and asked me to come to her new house to discuss a "vital matter" with her. When I got there at 8:00 p.m., I saw her alone. Ambassador Chuong was nowhere in sight, although he called me this morning on a related matter.

Clandestine Government

Madame Chnong told me in conspiratorial tones that "many Vietnamese of all parties" had asked her husband to head up a government of national unity. When I asked for specific names, she mentioned Nguyen Ton Hoan (Dai Viet, Paris), Pham Huy Co (exile, Paris), and later also Bui Van Tinh (former Minister of Interior and Ambassador to Japan). She said that her husband had never wanted to get mixed up in "exile politics" but now the pressure on the Chuongs was so great from so many Vietnamese to do something that she was considering the idea and wanted my advice "as a friend".

I said of course I had no advice, not even personal, to offer, but I thought we would like to be kept informed of the progress of this development. I said I assumed whatever "government" was created would remain clandestine. She asked whether the U.S. would support such a government. I did not respond to this but said I thought a surfaced government could hardly obtain any form of recognition while the Diem Government remained in power in Saigon. She said she was speaking of a clandestine government and clandestine support. I left her further queries unanswered other than to indicate again desire to be kept informed.

Madame Nhu

Madame Choong then said that she had told the Vietnamese community in New York and Washington (who constantly came to her for guidance and advice) that when the "wife of Nhu" came they should "run her

over with a car" (sic), and that if they could not do that they should throw eggs and tomatoes at her every time she appeared in public. She, Madame Chuong, had organized the White House picket demonstration of Vietnamese recently and she was quite capable of organizing against this "monster".

(Ambassador Chuong called me first thing today to stress that Madame Nhu should under no circumstances be received by high level U.S. officials, in particular the President. If she knew now that she would not be received, she would be much less likely to come. Her reason in coming is primarily to talk to top officials; the press and TV are only a secondary concern.)

One more point conveyed, though somewhat indirectly, by Madame Chuong: the U.S. is rapidly losing friends in Viet-Nam and is moving awfully slowly in coping with the situation. There is only one solution; get rid of both Diem and Nhu. The U.S. is responsible for doing it because it is only through U.S. support that the government holds together. All Vietnamese cordially hate it. Nhu is "un barbare" and Diem is an incompetent. What is the U.S. waiting for?

I tried to handle her as tactfully as possible while retaining her confidence.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET. Secret. Drafted by Kattenburg on September 17. On a copy of this memorandum sent to the White House, Forrestal wrote: "Family life in Vietnam", and next to Madame Chuong's threat to run over her daughter: "Mother love." (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous, Part II)

119. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, September 17, 1963.

0940. 1. Following is gist of 40 minute meeting [less than 1 line not declassified] with General Tran Thien Khiem afternoon 16 Sept. Meeting originated by Khiem through Maj. Nhon who notified [less than 1 line not declassified] on moments notice that Khiem has some time available and would like [*less than 1 line not declassified*] to drop in right away. From start and at Khiem's initiative, discussion devoted to status of situation since Khiem's talk with Harkins 31 August.² Khiem very candid throughout, was as usual thoughtful, but apparently straightforward. Answered questions without hesitation.

2. The Generals are still acting within legality and plan continue doing so as long as possible but becoming increasingly concerned over additional evidence Nhu negotiating for settlement with North.

3. Second week of September Generals formally requested President Diem to turn over to military key Departments of Defense, Interior, Psychological Warfare, and Education, proposing specific names as related in following paragraph. President has taken proposal under consideration but has already notified them that no decision will be made until after elections are held.³ Should proposal be turned down, Generals prepared continue push in other (no amplification obtained) directions.

4. For Defense, they have proposed Gen. Duong Van Minh, or Tran Van Don, or Nguyen Khanh. They anticipate that if decision is favorable, Gen. Don will be chosen. For Interior, their candidate is Ton That Dinh. Rationale is that Dinh will be acceptable to Diem. For Psywar, either General Tran Tu Oai or Le Van Kim. For Education, Tran Van Minh or Pham Xuan Chieu.

5. Counsellor Nhu has discussed with some Generals (Khiem stated he was not in on discussion and only mentioned Big Minh and General Nghiem as being among those with whom Nhu discussed the item) his conversation with Polish Commissioner Maneli. He told Generals that Maneli had brought him a proposal from DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong for start of trade between North and South Vietnam. Nhu had

informed the Generals that he had taken this under consideration and would consult with them in any future move. According to Nhu, Maneli had stated that he was at Nhu's complete disposal and ready to fly to Hanoi at a moment's notice. Nhu had also stated that French Ambassador Lalouette had also offered his services toward same end.

6. In connection with necessity maintain utmost security at present moment, Khiem stated that the key group is composed of three Generals: Big Minh, Nguyen Khanh, and himself who only fully confide among themselves. Allied Generals such as Kim, Chieu, and others are consulted only as need arises but are not privy of all thoughts and planning of the triumvirate. Khiem pleased that as far as he can determine, there has been no leak as to exactly what contacts USG has had with any member of trio.

7. In a side note, Khiem said that General Dinh was acting under instructions from Counsellor Nhu when Conein was called in for interview. Dinh had been instructed to deliberately intimidate Conein, hence pointed guns prop during interview. [*less than 1 line not declassified*] did not ask source of Khiem's info.

8. In another incidental comment, Khiem said that General Dinh claims that an American official has offered him the amount of 20 million plasters if he, Dinh, would overthrow the government and has so reported to Counsellor Nhu.

9. In closing, Khiem reiterated that the Generals would under no condition go along with Nhu should he make any step toward the North or even toward neutralization a la Laos.

¹ Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, South Vietnam Policy Files, September 16-30, 1963. Secret. There is no time of transmission on the source text.

² See [Document 33](#).

³ See [Document 155](#).

120. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)¹

Washington, September 17, 1963—12:01 p.m.

TELEPHONE CALL FROM MR McCONE

Sec resumed the call and replied the mtg at 5:30 today² is to deal with the question as to what we now tell Lodge to do. Letter will come up³ — also whether to bring him back. What is on Sec's mind is we might have him have one more talk prior to coming back for consultation. Then back here and then maybe take the other man back⁴ after talking here. M said in that Agency there would be insurmountable problems raised re this man—no confidence at all in him and M could assume no responsibility for the operation. Sec said question of how he is hooked on and the organization responsibilities do not have to follow the particular pattern as in the letter. Missed what M said. Sec thinks it should be talked out. If it is a policy question, that is one thing. Other kinds of questions are another matter. Harriman had a long talk this a.m. and within limits of confidence etc. he seems to be thinking along the terms we are. M not sure what terms are. This whole thing was built up by him through Rufus Phillips. Lodge does not know this fellow. Sec said Lansdale denied this. This point seems fairly incidental. Big job is getting something to Lodge that makes sense and also consider how—bring him back or send someone out—not too keen on Hawaii. M said you get him in town and then the press and Congress are on him. This not so in Hawaii. M said the Unna article⁵ was incredible and Sec told him what it stemmed from. Sec will be spending most of the rest of the day on it but if Lansdale thing is not appealing to M and McNamara⁶ Sec thinks it is a small part of it. M said he has no confidence at all in him. They could replace Richardson if Lodge wants it but not someone from the outside.⁷

¹ Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Phyllis D. Bernau.

² Reference is to a meeting at the White House with the President. In addition to Rusk and McCone, McNamara, Robert Kennedy, McGeorge Bundy, and Harriman attended. Johnson Library, Rusk Appointment Book) No record of the meeting has been found.

³ Document 104.

⁴ Reference is to Lansdale.

⁵ Reference is to an article by Warren Unna in The Washington Post, September 17, entitled "U.S Policy Mired in Views of 3 Agencies." Unna claimed that the Department of Defense and CIA wanted to get on with the prosecution of the war while the Department of State remained concerned about the Diem government's repression and unpopularity.

⁶ Ellipsis in the source text.

⁷ Rusk and McGeorge Bundy had another telephone conversation, September 17—3:47 p.m., regarding the 5:30 meeting. The transcription reads as follows:

"B returned the call and Sec thought at 5:30 the small group should meet first. B said that is the way it is. Only Sec, McNamara, McCone, Harriman, Bundy and AG will be there. Sec said key question is whether we bring him (Lodge) back. Question of message etc. B said Pres' reaction is against that but he has not examined all of it." (Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations)

121. Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (Krulak) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff(Taylor)¹

Washington, September 17, 1963.

SACSA-M 525-63

SUBJECT

Reconciliation versus Pressures and Persuasion

1. The two draft messages² do not differ significantly from the longer papers which you saw yesterday.³ The truly important document is in the covering memorandum.⁴
2. Taking the covering memorandum, paragraph by paragraph, these observations are pertinent:
 - a. Paragraph 1. Unless it is desired to set up circumstances where Reconciliation must be rejected as a barren course of action, it need not be accepted that Reconciliation and Pressures and Persuasion must be incompatible.
 - b. Paragraph 2. As long as the concept is retained that Reconciliation is nothing more than total acquiescence on our part, the content of this paragraph is correct. Under those circumstances Reconciliation would have to be rejected. It would be preferable, however, to see Phase I and Reconciliation both altered, to make them the very same. The revised Phase I would embody expressions of dissatisfaction and sincere warning on our part, coupled with hope, confidence, and a willingness to go halfway with Diem in any genuine action which he undertakes. As it stands now, neither Reconciliation nor Pressures embodies this total philosophy. Reconciliation, as expressed, has too little candor and too little bite. Pressures, as expressed, dwells too much on the limitations of Nhu and gives no evidence of US determination to help Diem wherever he exhibits good faith.
 - c. Paragraph 3. This is speculation and, along with Governor Harriman, I find no basis for real benefit for Nhu or South Vietnam in such a sequence.
 - d. Paragraph 4. This suggests that Hilsman himself is not content with the program which he has established.

- e. Paragraph 5. If Phase I of the Pressures and Persuasion track were designed to give Diem hope, while still presenting a picture of the unfavorable future which he must expect if he does not re-establish himself in the world opinion arena; if; in addition, Phase I did not pivot on the elimination of Nhu but only made plain to Diem the great benefits of reduction of Nhu's authority; if Phase I made clear our willingness to participate in rehabilitating the GVN in the world's eye, then there would be no problem of switching from one policy to another as Hilsman describes it, because under this arrangement there would only be one policy.
 - f. Paragraph 6. The long range plans of Nhu and the adequacy of GVN national resolve to achieve victory are facts that we cannot expect to have until matters are essentially concluded.
 - g. Paragraph 7. To proceed, as Hilsman proposes, with initial steps aimed at the elimination of Nhu, without offering hope to Diem regarding our own intentions, is indeed placing our confidence in an informed hunch. However, to proceed along the lines which I have described earlier, where Phase I has both strength and conciliatory characteristics, changes this significantly.
3. To exemplify the shift which would make the idea of reconciliation compatible with the idea of escalating pressure, I have made some marginal notes and interlineations on a copy of the Pressures and Persuasion approach.⁵ With those changes, I believe that the sequence of events is more logical, and far more promising, than either of the cables in their present form.

V.H. Krulak
Major General, USMC

¹ Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-186-69. Top Secret; Sensitive.

² Attachments 1 and 2 to [Document 114](#).

³ See [footnote 5](#), [Document 113](#).

⁴ Document 114.

⁵ Not printed.

122. Memorandum From the Deputy Regional Planning Adviser of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (Mendenhall) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)¹

Washington, September 17, 1963.

REPORT OF VISIT TO VIET-NAM, SEPTEMBER 6-10, 1963

Purpose and Itinerary

On September 6, 1963, I departed Washington, D.C., at your instruction and pursuant to a decision reached that day at the White House, to visit Viet-Nam and report back promptly on the situation in that country. This report supplements and completes the telegrams I sent (Saigon's 453, September 9, 1963² and Department's telegram 375 to Saigon, September 10, 1963³), and the oral reports I made on my return on September 10, 1963.

I arrived in Saigon at 6:00 a.m., September 8, and spent a few hours in consultation with Mr. Trueheart (the DCM) and other Embassy officers and attended a meeting with Ambassador Lodge, Trueheart, General Harkins (CG, MACV), General Meede (Chief of Staff, MACV), General Krulak (who had a similar mission on behalf of DOD as mine) and Colonel Dunn (Assistant to Ambassador Lodge).

At 10:30 a.m. I departed for Hue, and proceeded from there to Da Nang and Nha Trang. I talked with as many knowledgeable people as I could at these points, and returned to Saigon shortly after noon on September 9. I spent the remainder of that day consulting with American and Vietnamese officials, talked again with Ambassador Lodge, and left Saigon at 8:30 p.m. September 9.

Situation in Viet-Nam

1.

Saigon. I found a virtually complete breakdown of the civil government in Saigon following the events of August 20, 1963. The Embassy has

reported that Thuan, Secretary of State for the Presidency and Assistant Secretary of State for National Defense, felt useless, and that he stated he found Thanh, Secretary of State for National Economy, reading a detective story during office hours since the Ministry was not functioning. At a USOM meeting I attended, it was indicated that the Ministry of Rural Affairs was likewise not functioning. The USOM Director stated that Vietnamese officials in general did not want him to visit their offices because of their fear of the consequences of being seen with Americans. He added that in one case when he did visit a Vietnamese official in his office, that official looked under all the objects in his office for hidden microphones before he began to talk. Dean Vu Quoc Thuc also told me he had offered his resignation as Dean of the Saigon University Law School.

Saigon was heavy with an atmosphere of fear and hate. Fear is more prevalent than it was in October, 1961, when General Taylor and Mr. Rostow visited Viet-Nam on a special Presidential mission. Then the fear had been created by Viet Cong advances; this time, however, it arises from the reign of terror conducted by the Government itself. Many high officials are not sleeping at home because of their fear of arrest. I was warned immediately on arrival that I must be extremely careful about contacting Vietnamese friends because this might compromise them with the regime. My actual contacts were arranged circumspectly, and my friends' first remarks when I saw them were to the effect how greatly the situation had worsened since my departure from Viet-Nam a year ago.

The arrest of hundreds of students has had enormous effect on many officials, both civilian and military, because these are their children or nephews or nieces. Not only is this reflected in the attitude of bitter dislike displayed by officials toward the Government, but the Government's repression has also absorbed the attention of many officials in attempting to protect their children or negotiate with the police for their release.

The war against the Viet Cong has clearly receded to a secondary status for the people of Saigon. As my Vietnamese contact indicated, their first concern is now their "war" with the regime itself.

Dean Thuc brought up with me the explosive danger of a religious war between Buddhists and Catholics which could be sparked by continued GVN repression of the Buddhists. As an example of GVN "conciliatory" measures toward the Buddhists, I was told that

provincial bonzes had been released from prison and told to return to their provinces, but their identification papers were retained by the Government. Then on departure from Saigon they were arrested as Viet Cong because of their lack of identity papers. Word of this quickly spread through Saigon, with the result that a number of provincial bonzes have taken refuge in various homes in Saigon, including those of army officers.

Nhu is held clearly responsible by the people of Saigon for repression by the Government—he is the focal point of their bitterness and hate. Diem has become increasingly identified with Nhu as responsible for these measures, but this probably does not represent a majority view except among the students.

Increasing reports are being received that students are talking of moving over to the Viet Cong because of oppression by the Government. Also significant in this connection was Dean Thuc's equating of the dangers from the Government and the Viet Cong.

2.

Mekong Delta Provinces (South of Saigon). Because of lack of time I did not visit this area. In any case, the Buddhist problem has had no impact there, apparently because of the easy-going attitude of the Southerners on all matters, including religion.

I discussed the security situation in this area with the DCM who said that while there has been some improvement in road security, the incident rate continues to be very high. He also said that the number of armed Viet Cong is about 25,000 in the country as a whole. He described the strategic hamlet program in the Delta as a mess, largely because of lack of coordination between the military and civilian authorities.

I had also intended to call on Colonel Hoang Van Lac, Special Commissioner for Strategic Hamlets, to get his assessment of the situation since his detached, experienced judgment is valuable. I found, however, that his views had just been obtained by Rufus Phillips of USOM. Lac confirmed the disorganized state of the strategic hamlet program in most of the Delta provinces, and expressed the view that the war would be lost by 1965 if the GVN is not changed.

3. Provinces Just North of Saigon. I was informed by the Embassy Political Officer in charge of internal affairs that security has much improved in the Zone D area where Viet Cong installations have been broken up and the area is now being criss-crossed by roads. However, the Viet Cong have largely moved over from Zone D to the Duong Minh Chu region in northern Tay Ninh province.

4.

Central Plateau Provinces. Bad weather for flying, plus lack of time, prevented a visit to this area. Since there are so few Vietnamese in this region, there has, in any case, been no particular impact of the Buddhist problem here.

In this area there has been substantial improvement in security over the past year which is in important measure attributable to the programs carried out with the Montagnards. Recent deterioration (presumably only temporary) has occurred in Darlac Province where a new province chief, in a literal application of strategic hamlet orders from Saigon, has tried to recover part of the arms issued to certain Montagnard villagers, and thus stirred up resentments. (This is a typical provincial application, without judgment or discrimination, of orders emanating from Nhu and/or Diem, and is prompted by the provincial official's fear of the consequences if he fails to obey orders completely.)

I was also informed [less than 1 line not declassified] that the Special Forces border guards recently installed in areas close to the Laos border have found many more Viet Cong in those areas than was previously thought to be the case. It is impossible to state, however, whether this represents an increase in Viet Cong in these areas since there is no real previous base for comparison.

5. Central Coastal Provinces. I concentrated most of my brief stay in Vietnam in this area, visiting Hue, Da Nang and Nha Trang. This is the region (together with Saigon) where the Buddhist problem has been most acute and has had the greatest impact.

I got a very good feel for the four northern provinces of Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam and Quang Tin. I found Hue and Da Nang cities of fear and hate, just like Saigon. The civil bureaucracy in those cities, as well as the regional civil service with its headquarters in Hue, is riddled with bitter discontent over the Government's repression. Students, civil servants and young officers in the Hue area are reported

to feel increasingly that they may as well move over to the Viet Cong since the only reign of terror they know has been that of the GVN.

Province chiefs in these four provinces, on the other hand, are loyal to the Government—not surprisingly since that appears to be the first criterion for selection. District chiefs, to the extent their views were known, are also considered loyal with one exception.

The armed forces in these four provinces presented a mixed picture. [*less than 1 line not declassified*] appears by his conduct completely loyal. (One report I received was that he has been bought by the Government for 2 million plasters. This could not be confirmed, but my source stated Tri had plenty of cash, including dollars.) The Corps G-2 and G-3 were described as strongly condemnatory of the GVN's repression of the Buddhists. Their future was uncertain following the removal of General Nghiem as Corps Commander because of his Buddhist sympathies.

I was told that considerable dissatisfaction exists among lower-ranking officers for political reasons, but the extent of this discontent is not clear (partly because of limitations under which U.S. military officers appear to operate in their relations with Vietnamese officers on political and civilian matters). In any case, it is evident that the armed forces continue to function as a disciplined force under current circumstances.

The political dissatisfaction of both civilian and military officials is vented almost completely on Nhu. Diem appears largely to escape the same opprobrium.

Security in Quang Tin is deteriorating—August, 1963, was the worst month since November, 1962. This province was described as generally poor from a security standpoint. (This incidentally is a province where the province chief was unanimously described to me as incompetent, but as one who owed his job to his loyalty to the Government.) In Quang Nam, where the Viet Cong had been gradually pushed back from coastal areas over the past months, there is recent evidence of a reversal of this trend (e.g., the nightly appearance of Viet Cong about 1000 meters from the Special Forces training camp located about 10 kilometers from the city of Da Nang). It is not clear whether the Buddhist issue has caused or contributed to this worsening of security, but it is known that the Buddhist agitation has extended to rural villages in Quang Nam and Thua Thien. Reports from Hue have stated that in the latter province villagers are beginning to opt for the Viet Cong.

Aside from the four northern coastal provinces, time did not permit me to get the same feel for the other coastal provinces. During my stop in Nha Trang, I was only able to talk to U.S. military officers who, from their limited vantage point, believed there was no Buddhist problem now in the Nha Trang area, although that very morning a report had been received (and was being checked) that a statue of Buddha had "miraculously" sprung up about 20 kilometers out of Nha Trang. I had hoped to talk to the [less than 1 line not declassified] but found he was absent. Reports of this which I was later shown in Saigon stated that strong feelings and an atmosphere of terror exist in the Nha Trang area in connection with the Buddhist problem. I also got indications that this problem was felt in varying degrees in Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Ninh Thuan, and Binh Thuan provinces.

Conclusions

1. If Nhu remains in Viet-Nam, thus retaining his power, the choice for the Vietnamese people will be between Diem-Nhu and the Viet Cong. The evidence indicates that, with this choice, the people will move in gradually growing numbers toward the Viet Cong. I had thought on the basis of my earlier tour of duty in Viet-Nam that the Vietnamese people might, under such circumstances, begin to shift from anti-Communism to neutralism. While these are small indications that neutralist thinking is indeed developing, I came away from this visit convinced that the bitterness of the Vietnamese over the recent oppression of the GVN will move them increasingly all the way over to the Viet Cong unless rapid steps are taken to remove Nhu. Both our DCM in Saigon and our Consul in Hue also believe this will be the case.
2. Thus, no matter how good our military measures are, it will not be possible to win the guerrilla war if Nhu remains in power. One need only recall Mao Tse-Tung's dictum of the guerrillas as fish and the people as water. With the people increasingly hostile to the Government, its armed forces cannot defeat the guerrillas. To cite one way in which security is likely to deteriorate: There have been cases in Central Viet-Nam (not specifically associated with recent political events) of strategic hamlets betrayed from within, e.g., by leaving gates open or furnishing Viet Cong with defense plans. This type of betrayal can be expected to grow unless GVN policies and personnel are changed.

Recommendation

That Nhu be removed from Viet-Nam, and that the U.S. take whatever action is necessary for this purpose.

The U.S. responsibility vis-a-vis the Viet-Nam problem is inescapable: Vietnamese pursue a constant refrain of asking what we Americans are going to do about the situation in their country. When we reply that it is up to them to act, they retort that the U.S. put the Ngo family into power and gave it all the arms it possesses, which are now being used against the people, not the Communists. The U.S. can thus not escape responsibility whether it acts or fails to act. A refusal to act would be just as much interference in Viet-Nam's affairs as acting.

¹ Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, POL 25 Buddhist Dispute. Secret.

² Document 78.

³ In telegram 375, September 10, Mendenhall, who had returned to Washington, sent the Embassy an additional report on his visit to Vietnam. Mendenhall's report covered a conversation he had with the Dean of the Saigon University Law School, Va Quoc Thuc, who predicted that Vietnam was on the verge of an explosive religious war between Catholics and Buddhists. This pessimistic view, Mendenhall stated in his telegram, "emphasized the gravity of the political crisis in Viet-Nam." (Department of State, Central Files, POL S VIET)

123. Memorandum by the Assistant Director for Rural Affairs, United States Operations Mission, Vietnam (Phillips)¹

Washington, September 17, 1963.

COMMENTS ON THE NECESSITY FOR AN ADVANCED DECISION TO INTRODUCE U.S. FORCES IN VIET-NAM

1. I wish to express my strong disagreement with the need to hinge our doing anything in Viet-Nam to change the GVN upon making a decision now to commit U.S. forces there, as expressed by Mr. Mecklin to the Cabinet level meeting of 10 September,² and in his paper "A Policy for Viet-Nam".³
2. Mr. Mecklin stated that in order to achieve the desirable policy objective of ousting the Nhus, without allowing the VC to make unacceptable gains, it was necessary to decide in advance to introduce U.S. Combat forces into Viet-Nam. Such a decision is necessary under all circumstances according to Mr. Mecklin, because there is real danger that a successor regime would be even more ineffective or that Vietnamese military forces would fragment into rival camps.
3. The dangers Mr. Mecklin has cited certainly exist, however, he overstates them. Mr. Mecklin also overestimates Mr. Nhu's strength and the potential opposition's weakness. If the opinions of many key Vietnamese who speak as intimate friends can be considered evidence, Nhu commands little true loyalty. At present he has support from certain key military figures such as Col. Tung and General Dinh but this is based more on opportunism and on their loyalty to the President than to Nhu. Nhu is a cold ruthless man who has on occasion denigrated most of his followers in front of others. This has earned him intense dislike along with fear and respect for his brains but not deep loyalty.
4. Secondly, the officer corps is not as indecisive or divided as it may seem to an outsider. The Generals did not launch a coup because they lacked the troops, a plan, confidence in the U.S. support for the GVN as well as word of support for the coup, and a sufficiently favorable climate of opinion among the officer corps. The key missing item was confidence in the U.S.-without some tangible evidence of U.S. support it was extremely difficult if not impossible to rally the subordinate unit commanders required. With the tide of sentiment running high in the

officer corps against the Nhus-it will not be difficult to mobilize this sentiment if the U.S. acts. But words of criticism only have little meaning. They have been heard before (after the 1960 coup, after the Taylor Mission, etc.).

5. In my opinion it will not be necessary to go so far as to cut off all aid. Selective cuts keyed to a carefully managed psychological warfare campaign aimed at specific targets such as Tung and the Nhus will seriously undermine confidence in the Nhus while restoring confidence in the U.S. A local "cold war" will certainly ensue. We must be prepared for it with the necessary funds to go around Saigon, if this is required, to keep the province program moving. The crisis will require steady nerves and it will probably produce retaliatory action by Nhu such as the declaration of certain Americans persona non grata. We must be prepared to stand our ground, request precise evidence and so forth, and keep tightening the thumb screws. We must be careful to aim each action at the Nhus, thus if the war effort is impaired the blame can be pinned on the Nhus. Given the feelings of the officer corps against the Viet Cong so heavily cited by the Defense Department, it is extremely likely that they will act before the VC make any serious inroads.
6. Concerning the stability of any successor regime, the Generals have declared and there is little reason to doubt their sincerity, that they do not wish a military dictatorship. Many of them cite Korea as an example of what they do not want. Detailed discussion, during the preparatory period of the aborted coup, revealed that the Generals want a mixed government with minor army participation. Their main interest being to reform the army, the civil administration in the provinces so that both would cooperate and fight the war with the degree of spirit required to win. There is some danger, of course, of a struggle for power but it is conditioned in Viet-Nam by the need to work together in order to survive.
7. Certainly no one should rule out the possibility of the ultimate use of U.S. troops and they should be ready to protect dependents if the going gets rough before Nhu topples but the entire policy should not be hinged on this contingency. The use of U.S. troops to fight the war against the VC would, in any case, be a mistake. The Vietnamese are willing to fight and can fight. If we can help give them a government worth fighting for, this single action will be worth more than any number of U.S. troops.
8. This need to give the Vietnamese something worth fighting for and the conclusion that the Vietnamese will fight to win for a government without the Nhus are what Mr. Mecklin and I agree upon. However I believe he underestimates the results of a determined psychological

warfare campaign by the U.S. (both covert and overt) to prepare the stage for a successful overthrow of the GVN while being too optimistic about the possible results of the direct use of US forces.

Rufus C. Phillips⁴

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. An attached note from Forrestal to McGeorge Bundy, September 17, reads: "This does not add to what you already know; but I still think that Phillips' judgments of Vietnamese reactions are as good as any we have. If you think of it, he is the only reporter we have with first hand-long term knowledge of this situation both in Saigon and in the field."

² See [Document 83](#).

³ Document 81.

⁴ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

124. Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between
the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs
(Harriman) and Michael V. Forrestal of the National
Security Council Staff¹

Washington, September 17, 1963—4:20 p.m.

Governor Harriman called Mr. Forrestal. He said Roger and he [were] very much disappointed with draft.² Proposal of visit a disaster. He said it is sending two men opposed to our policy, plus one who wouldn't stand up, to carry out policy.³ Mr. Forrestal agreed. He said this must have been added after he saw it.

Governor, Hilsman and Forrestal discussed the situation and what message to Lodge should say.

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Mildred Leatherman.

² Reference is to a draft of the telegram, [Document 125](#).

³ Harriman is apparently referring to McNamara and Taylor when he describes the "two men opposed to our policy." The "one who wouldn't stand up" has not been identified.

125. Telegram From the White House to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 17, 1963—9:28 p.m.

CAP 63516. Eyes only personal for Ambassador Lodge. Dept pass immediately. Deliver only one copy. No other distribution in Dept whatever. From the President.

1. Highest level meeting today has approved broad outline of an action proposals program designed to obtain from GVN, if possible, reforms and changes in personnel necessary to maintain support of Vietnamese and U.S. opinion in war against Viet Cong. This cable reports this program and our thinking for your comment before a final decision. Your comment requested soonest.
2. We see no good opportunity for action to remove present government in immediate future. Therefore, as your most recent messages suggest, we must for the present apply such pressures as are available to secure whatever modest improvements on the scene may be possible. We think it likely that such improvement can make a difference, at least in the short run. Such a course, moreover, is consistent with more drastic effort as and when means become available, and we will be in touch on other channels² on this problem.
3. We share view in your 523³ that best available reinforcement to your bargaining position in this interim period is clear evidence that all U.S. assistance is granted only on your say-so. Separate telegram² discusses details of this problem, but in this message we specifically authorize you to apply any controls you think helpful for this purpose. You are authorized to delay any delivery of supplies or transfer of funds by any agency until you are satisfied that delivery is in U.S. interest, bearing in mind that it is not our current policy to cut off aid entirely. In other words, we share your view that it will be helpful for GVN to understand that your personal approval is a necessary part of all U.S. assistance. We think it may be particularly desirable for you to use this authority in limiting or rerouting any and all forms of assistance and support which now go to or through Nhu or individuals like Tung who are associated with him. This authorization specifically includes aid actions currently held in abeyance and you are authorized to set those in train or hold them up further in your

discretion. We leave entirely in your hands decisions on the degree of privacy or publicity you wish to give to this process.

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

- a.

Clear the air—Diem should get everyone back to work and get them to focus on winning the war. He should be broadminded and compassionate in his attitude toward those who have, for understandable reasons, found it difficult under recent circumstances fully to support him.

A real spirit of reconciliation could work wonders on the people he leads; a punitive, harsh or autocratic attitude could only lead to further resistance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- h. Party—Can Lao party should not be covert or semi-covert but a broad association of supporters engaged in a common, winning cause. This could perhaps be best accomplished by disbanding the party and starting afresh.

- i. Repeal or suitable amendment Decree 10.

- j. Rehabilitation by ARVN of pagodas.

- k. Establishment of Ministry of Religious Affairs.
 - l. Liberation of passport issuances and currency restrictions enabling all to leave who wish to.
 - m. Acceptance of Buddhist inquiry mission from World Federation to report true facts of situation to world.
5. You may wish to add or subtract from the above list, but need to set psychological tone and image is paramount. Diem has taken positive actions in past of greater or less scope than those listed, but they have had little practical political effect since they were carried out in such a way as to make them hollow or, even if real, unbelievable (e.g., martial law already nominally lifted, Assembly elections scheduled, and puppet bonzes established).
 6. Specific "reforms" are apt to have little impact without dramatic, symbolic move which convinces Vietnamese that reforms are real. As practical matter we share your view that this can best be achieved by some visible reduction in influence of Nhus, who are symbol to disaffected of all that they dislike in GVN. This we think would require Nhus departure from Saigon and preferably Vietnam at least for extended vacation. We recognize the strong possibility that these and other pressures may not produce this result, but we are convinced that it is necessary to try.
 7. In Washington, in this phase, we would plan to maintain a posture of disapproval of recent GVN actions, but we would not expect to make public our specific requests of Diem. Your comment on public aspects of this phase is particularly needed.
 8. We note your reluctance to continue dialogue with Diem until you have more to say, but we continue to believe that discussions with him are at a minimum an important source of intelligence and may conceivably be a means of exerting some persuasive effect even in his present state of mind. If you believe that full control of U.S. assistance provides you with means of resuming dialogue, we hope you will do so. We ourselves can see much virtue in effort to reason even with an unreasonable man when he is on a collision course. We repeat, however, that this is a matter for your judgment.
 9. Meanwhile, there is increasing concern here with strictly military aspects of the problem, both in terms of actual progress of operations and of need to make effective case with Congress for continued prosecution of the effort. To meet these needs, President has decided to send Secretary of Defense and General Taylor to Vietnam, arriving early next week. It will be emphasized here that it is a military mission and that all political decisions are being handled through you as President's senior representative.

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

¹ Source: Washington Federal Records Center, RG 84, Saigon Embassy Files: FRC 68 A 5159, SGN (63) 19 GVN. Top Secret; Flash; Eyes Only. Prepared in the White House and sent to the Department of State for transmission to Saigon. Also printed in *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Book 12, pp. 545-547.

In a memorandum to Rusk, McNamara, McCone, Harriman, and Robert Kennedy, September 17, Bundy stated that he drafted this cable. Bundy attached a draft of CAP 63516 which was similar although not identical to the text printed here. Bundy's memorandum reads in part: "I have taken the liberty of doing a draft of a possible instruction that would initiate action under what we are now calling Phase I of Track 2—namely, a final effort of persuasion and pressure short of a decision to dump the regime no matter what." (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous, Part II)

² Not further identified.

³ Document 111.

126. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 18, 1963, 5 p.m.

536. For President only, pass White House directly, no other distribution whatever. Re your CAP 63516.²

1. If Secretary of Defense and General Taylor come to Viet-Nam, they will have to call on President Diem and I will have to accompany them. This will be taken here as a sign that we have decided to forgive and forget and will be regarded as marking the end of our period of disapproval of the oppressive measures which have been taken here since last May. It would certainly put a wet blanket on those working for a change of government. The family are only too anxious to promote the idea that everything is finished and cleared up, and we should now go ahead and win the war.
2. Believe, therefore, that Secretary of Defense and General Taylor should come with eyes open knowing that this is what the reaction will be. It is quite impossible at their level to distinguish between the political and military.
3. I have been observing a policy of silence which we have reason to believe is causing a certain amount of apprehension and may just be getting the family into the mood to make a few concessions. The effect of this will obviously be lost if we make such a dramatic demonstration as that of having the Secretary of Defense and General Taylor come out here.³

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. Received at 7:58 a.m. and passed to the White House at 8:25 a.m.

² Document 125.

³ McGeorge Bundy called Rusk to discuss this message at 10:19 a.m. The transcription of the conversation began as follows:

"B said Pres asked B to check with Sec on the incoming. Sent it around for distribution to those present yesterday p.m. What he is thinking about is best message back and best way of structuring the mission so as not to have consequences Lodge is concerned about."

The conversation concluded:

"Sec said last para is crucial to whole business. B replied this is Bob's preference. Meet with Harkins in Hawaii but Pres thinks you have to look at it to see it. Sec hopes we will not announce anything until further communication with Lodge. B said nothing will be announced. Mentioned stop order to UAJ and Sec will talk to Harriman about it." (Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations) The last sentence is a reference to the question of including U. Alexis Johnson in the McNamara-Taylor party.

127. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, September 18, 1963—10:05 a.m.

Governor Harriman called Mr. Bundy. He asked what is the reaction to the answer from Lodge.² Mr. Bundy said he and Mike talked to the President on it a few minutes and he has some ideas which Mike is putting into draft reply.³ He thinks we should be able to stage manage so doesn't give Mr. Dany comfort and doesn't undercut Lodge. Thinking about going back to him making mission more palatable. Suggestion personal counsel with people at table yesterday as to how they would advise doing it. They talked about making it military and not joint mission. Governor said Alex⁴ fairly high fellow in State Dept; also bit brainwashed by Nolting. Mr. Bundy said he would make the point to Secretary. Governor said perhaps Secretary will want to send a lower level fellow. Mr. Bundy said knowing of Governor, Roger, and Mike's relationship, they would have a representative if Mike went. Mr. Bundy said he would call the Secretary.

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations. No Distribution. Transcribed by Mildred Leatherman.

² Document 126.

³ For the telegram as sent, see [Document 127](#).

⁴ U. Alexis Johnson.

128. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 18, 1963—4:52 p.m.

431. Personal for Ambassador Lodge from the President. No other distribution. I appreciate your prompt comment and I quite understand the problem you see in visit of McNamara and Taylor. At the same time my need for this visit is very great indeed, and I believe we can work out an arrangement which takes care of your basic concerns. Will you let me have your comment on the following as soon as possible:

1. We can make it clear here, and McNamara and Taylor can make it clear in Saigon to the GVN, that this visit is not designed to bring comfort to Diem. My own thought is that in any visit McNamara makes to Diem he will want to speak some home truths on the military consequences of the current difficulties, and also to make it clear that the United States Government is not open to oriental divisive tactics.
2. We can readily set up this visit as one which you and I have decided on together, or even as one which is sent in response to your own concern about winning the war in the current situation. For example, we could announce that the purpose of the mission is to consider with you the practical ways and means of carrying out my announced policy that we will support activities which will further the war effort in South Vietnam and avoid supporting activities which do not. The whole cast of the visit will be that of military consultation with you on the execution of the policy which you and I have determined.
3. As our last message² said, my own central concern in sending this mission is to make sure that my senior military advisers are equipped with a solid on-the-spot understanding of the situation, as a basis both for their participation in our councils here, and for the Administration's accounting to the Congress on this critically important contest with the Communists. Having grown up in an Ambassador's house, I am well trained in the importance of protecting the effectiveness of the man on-the-spot, and I want to handle this particular visit in a way which contributes to and does not detract from your own responsibilities. But in the tough weeks which I see ahead, I just do not see any substitute for the ammunition I will get from an on-the-spot and authoritative military appraisal.

4.

I do not think I can delay announcement of the McNamara mission beyond Saturday,³ and I will be grateful for a further prompt comment on this message⁴ so that we can be firmly together on the best possible handling of the announcement and of the mission itself.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. Drafted in the White House and sent to the Department of State for transmission to Saigon. Bundy's covering memorandum to Rusk, September 18, reads: "As I said on the telephone, the President is very clear in his mind that he wants this to go out at once, but I am sure he would be responsive to any amendment you yourself would wish to propose to him."

On the White House draft of this telegram there is a marginal note indicating that McNamara also received a copy. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables) Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, p. 548.

² Document 125.

³ September 20.

⁴ Lodge advised the President in a message transmitted in telegram 540 from Saigon, September 19, received at 11:18 p.m., September 18, as follows:

"Believe it would be helpful if you could announce that I had asked McNamara and Taylor to come to consider with me ways and means of carrying out your policy. They can indeed be most helpful to me.

"Believe we cannot avoid a call by McNamara, Taylor, and myself on Diem, and we must make every effort that this call does not look like an endorsement." (Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US)

129. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 19, 1963, noon.

541. CINCPAC/POLAD exclusive for Admiral Felt. Eyes only for the Secretary.

1. Dinner last night with Ambassador and Mrs. Goburdhun (Chairman of the ICC in Vietnam), brother Nhu, Foreign Minister Cuu, my wife, and me.
2. Nhu was extremely talkative. He repeated time and again that it was he who had invented the strategic hamlets, that everyone, including the Americans, had said he couldn't do it but that he had done it. He reiterated time and again that the Buddhists had been murdered and had not committed suicide.
3. In all this Cuu was a faithful echo. But when Cuu said that the Buddhist corpses had been found with their arms straight instead of folded, Mrs. Goburdhun intervened with some heat and said that this had not been the case.
4. I have all along suspected that Nhu had promoted the dinner so I did not bring anything up, but waited for him. I was not disappointed. After awhile he said he could quite understand how Americans were naturally horrified to think that they were supporting conditions which were so bad that Buddhist priests were killing themselves. And he said he could quite understand why Senator Church had put in his resolution² (copy of which I had already sent to Palace).
5. I said I was glad he understood it, adding that he should realize that in the last few days four more Senators had added their names and that it would not be difficult to get enough signatures to guarantee a majority. This would be a body blow to foreign aid.
6. He then said that President Kennedy was the leader of the Free World and that he must save President Kennedy's face.
7. I said that I was not worrying about President Kennedy's face but about our joint ability, Vietnamese and Americans, as partners, to carry out the program and that one of the things which endangered the program was the extremely bad publicity which there had been ever since last May and which had created grave doubts as to whether the program was worthy of support. I said something should be done to show Americans there had been a real improvement and it

was for that reason that I had suggested that he go away for awhile at least until December so as to provide an opportunity to get the appropriation bill passed. I said I realized that he and the President, in principle, were in favor of atoning to the Buddhists, but that President Diem had to do something symbolic which would hopefully provide some material for a photograph.

8. Nhu said: I don't care for myself; I would be glad to do anything. We must do whatever is necessary. But if I go away it will hurt the morale of the Republican Youth which is so essential to victory. But I will be glad to do whatever is necessary. All along he kept stressing the vital importance of the Republican Youth and never once mentioned the Army.
9. As we broke up, I said several times: I hope to hear from you very soon.
10. This meeting certainly gave me the chance to make the point I wanted to make and it was a meeting which, I am sure, he (and not I) had arranged. This made for a tone most favorable to me and put me in a much stronger position than if I had sought an audience.
11. Frankly, I am not impressed by his statement that he is willing to do anything because actually he isn't.
12. Nhu is always a striking figure. He has a handsome, cruel face and is obviously very intelligent. His talk last night was like a phonograph record and, in spite of his obvious ruthlessness and cruelty, one feels sorry for him. He is wound up as tight as a wire. He appears to be a lost soul, a haunted man who is caught in a vicious circle. The Furies are after him.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Received at 5:54 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House at 7:10 a.m.

² See [footnote 3](#), [Document 84](#).

130. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 19, 1963, 4 p.m.

544. Eyes only for President only, pass White House directly, no other distribution. Re your CAP 63516.²

1. Agree that no good opportunity for action to remove present government in immediate future is apparent and that we should, therefore, do whatever we can as an interim measure pending such an eventuality.
2. Virtually all the topics under paragraph 4, letters a to m, have been taken up with Diem and Nhu at one time or another, most of them by me personally. They think that most of them would either involve destroying the political structure on which they rest or loss of face or both. We, therefore, could not realistically hope for more than lip service. Frankly, I see no opportunity at all for substantive changes. Detailed comments on items a to m are contained in separate telegram.³
3. There are signs that Diem-Nhu are somewhat bothered by my silence. According to one well placed source, they are guessing and off-balance and "desperately anxious" to know what US posture is to be. They may be preparing some kind of a public relations package, possibly to be opened after the elections. I believe that for me to press Diem on things which are not in the cards and to repeat what we have said several times already would be a little shrill and would make us look weak, particularly in view of my talk with Nhu last night at a dinner where I had a golden opportunity to make the main points of your CAP 63516 as reported in 541.⁴
4. Also, I doubt that a public relations package will meet needs of situation which seems particularly grave to me, notably in the light of General Big Minh's opinion expressed very privately yesterday that the Viet Cong are steadily gaining in strength; have more of the population on their side than has the GVN; that arrests are continuing and that the prisons are full; that more and more students are going over to the Viet Cong; that there is great graft and corruption in the Vietnamese administration of our aid; and that the "heart of the army is not in the war". All this by Vietnamese No. 1 General is now echoed

by Secretary of Defense Thuan (see my 542),⁵ who wants to leave the country.

5. As regards your paragraph 3 on withholding of aid, I still hope that I may be informed of methods, as requested in my 478, September 11,⁶ which will enable us to apply sanctions in a way which will really affect Diem and Nhu without precipitating an economic collapse and without impeding the war effort. We are studying this here and have not yet found a solution. If a way to do this were to be found, it would be one of the greatest discoveries since the enactment of the Marshall Plan in 1947 because, so far as I know, the US has never yet been able to control any of the very unsatisfactory governments through which we have had to work in our many very successful attempts to make these countries strong enough to stand alone.
6. I also believe that whatever sanctions we may discover should be directly tied to a promising coup d'etat and should not be applied without such a coup being in prospect. In this connection, I believe that we should pursue contact with Big Minh and urge him along if he looks like acting. I particularly think that the idea of supporting a Vietnamese Army independent of the government should be energetically studied.
7. I will, of course, give instructions that programs which can be effectively held up should be held up and not released without my approval provided that this can be done without serious harmful effect to the people and to the war effort. Technical assistance and dollar support to communications support programs may be one way. This would be a fly-speck in the present situation and would have no immediate effect, but I hope that it may get Vietnamese officials into the habit of asking me to release items which are held up and that, over a long period of time, it might create opportunities for us to get little things done.
8. But it is not even within the realm of possibility that such a technique could lead them to do anything which causes loss of face or weakening of their political organization. In fact, to threaten them with suppression of aid might well defeat our purposes and might make a bad situation very much worse.
9. There should in any event be no publicity whatever about this procedure. If it is possible to halt a program, I intend to appear not as a czar but as one who will try to do his best to put the item back on the track.
10. As regards your paragraph 6 and "dramatic symbolic moves", I really do not think they could understand this even if Thao wanted to, although I have talked about it to Diem, and to Nhu last night (see

my 541). They have scant comprehension of what it is to appeal to public opinion as they have really no interest in any other opinion than their own. I have repeatedly brought up the question of Nhu's departure and have stressed that if he would just stay away until after Christmas, it might help get the appropriation bill through. This seems like a small thing to us but to them it seems tremendous as they are quite sure that the army would take over if he even stepped out of the country.

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

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central files, POL 15 S VIET Top Secret; Immediate Eyes Only. Received at 7:04 a.m. and passed to the White House at 8:35 a.m.

² Document 125.

³ Document 131.

⁴ Document 129.

⁵ In telegram 542, September 19, Lodge reported the gist of a conversation between D'Orlandi and Thuan in which Thuan reportedly stated that the war was going badly and that he would be glad to leave Vietnam. Lodge commented that Thuan's statement, taken with Big Minh's of September 18, was a good indication of just how badly things were going in Saigon. Lodge's concluding observation was: "So we now have both the Secretary of Defense and the number one General on record—not just the Saigon rumor mill." (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET)

⁶ Document 86.

131. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 19, 1963, 4 p.m.

545. Eyes only for President only, pass White House directly, no other distribution. This telegram supplements my 544² I am in general agreement with list of "possible helpful actions" with the important qualification that items are for most part not possible of attainment. They involve leopard's changing his spots. Specific comments on correspondingly lettered items paragraph 4 follow:

- a. Clear the air. Diem is, of course, in a sense already trying to get everyone back to work and focussed on winning the war. That is, he would like them to forget or ignore or accept his interpretation of recent events. He is in his present situation precisely because he took a deliberate decision not to be broadminded and compassionate and not to adopt a real spirit of reconciliation. Much the same comment applies as in a.
- [b.] Diem will not let any of the leadership elements out unless he is satisfied that they are thoroughly cowed and will cause no further trouble. He will not leave them unmolested if they turn out to be uncowed. His whole approach with Buddhists and students has been to terrorize them. If he were now able to convince students, for example, that they would not be molested, chances are very great that demonstrations, etc., would get completely out of hand. This is on assumption that there had not been simultaneously a radical change in the government.
- c. Press. For the moment foreign press appears to be operating as freely as before August 20, censorship is off, dispatches are going through without delay. I do not think Diem would consider changing GVN policies on domestic press.
- d. Secret and combat police. This would be equivalent to asking Diem to tie both hands behind his back. He will abandon operations against opposition when he is satisfied they are no longer a proximate threat and resume them when he concludes that they are.
- e. Cabinet changes. Popular discontent does not run particularly to the Cabinet but to the family. I should not be surprised to see some Cabinet reshuffling after elections, but I would not expect it to have any measurable effect on popular attitudes, since public would not

expect new blood to have any more authority than the old. For example, there is a brand new Foreign Secretary, Mr. Cuu, and he is the most shameless sycophant I have ever seen.

- f. Elections. These are now ten days away. We have already reported before elections postponed that there are only about half as many candidates as the last time and that there was widespread apathy among voters. Elections will not be a meaningful expression of popular will and could not at this stage be made to seem so, even with most skillful press agency. Government will probably have to make massive and well observed effort to get voters to polls.
- g. Assembly. GVN may well submit policies to Assembly for vote of confidence, but I do not really believe that this will have much effect on the "external image."
- h. Party. Diem might conceivably agree to abolish Can Lao party. However, as we have previously estimated, something else would immediately be created to take its place, because a secret political organization is an essential part of the family's power base and scheme of operation.
- i. Decree No. 10. Possibly something can be done on this.
- j. Rehabilitation of pagodas. This is going forward and is probably nearly completed.
- k. Ministry of Religious Affairs. Department previously rejected this idea in favor of Council on Religious Affairs (Deptel 1196).³ Believe this was right decision.
- l. Liberalization of passport issuances, etc. This is a key control device which Diem would not consider giving up. It would probably work against our own interests, in removing from the country much of the solvent opposition.
- m. Buddhist inquiry mission. GVN would not permit free inquiry by outside body, in my opinion.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET Top Secret; Immediate. Received at 7:16 a.m. and passed to the White House at 8:02 a.m.

² Document 130.

³ vol. III, p. 364.

132. Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)¹

Washington, September 19, 1963—10:23 a.m.

TELEPHONE CALL TO MR HILSMAN

Sec referred to telegram about Maneli² —he wonders if it is not better since there are one or two utterly simple and fundamental things that are crucial at most to find out from the British Amb whether this means something on the spot de facto partition or call the whole thing off. [*sic*] Sec worried about signal that would go to the North until we go to Maneli in this situation and say what about a cease-fire. It seems to him we can find out what the answer is to the central question without exposing ourselves. Sec asked H to give it some thought.

H just reading 544³ and he seems to want some of our thinking re para 5 he asks for it—Sec said they have not figured anything out there and his guess is to wait until the trip occurs and see what happens there. Can't see action here. H then said it is just that para 5 asked for our thinking which we could get out. Sec said o.k.

¹ Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Phyllis D. Bernau.

² Not found.

³ Document 130.

133. Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Bundy) to the Secretary of Defense (McNamara)¹

Washington, September 19, 1963.

Here is a first crack at draft instructions.² In my talk to Mac, he expressed the fear that Dean Rusk will be very sensitive to any statements that appear to make you responsible for recommending a change in policy or getting deeply into political matters. Hence, I have tried to couch this in the most diplomatic possible language while at the same time making clear that you can inquire in any area whatever. In particular, note the language about "refining" our present policy.³

Checking this against General Krulak's first draft⁴ to General Taylor, I see that my draft does not include a reaffirmation of our basic resolve to see the war through. This could well be added as an initial subparagraph for what you would say to Diem, but should be accompanied by reference to the President's announced position of assisting those actions which will further the anti-Communist effort, while at the same time discouraging and refusing support to those actions that do not.

I understand that you are meeting with the President and Dean Rusk this afternoon.⁵ So far I have only talked to Mac on the phone, but will be working with him just as soon as we can get together. For your information, he may bring up the suggestion that State be represented not by Walt Rostow but by Marshall Green, Hilsman's new deputy. Green is a very old friend of both Mac and myself and is a particularly good observer, unscarred by emotions. In many ways, I would consider him preferable to Walt, and it may well be that he would also sit better with Dean Rusk.

W.P. Bundy⁶

¹ Source: Department of State, William R Bundy Papers, Chron (ISA) 1963. Top Secret.

² Attached to the source text, but not printed. For the instructions as approved, see [Document 142](#).

³ Reference is to a sentence in the Bundy draft in the last paragraph which reads: "The principal objective of your mission is to obtain information that will assist me in further refining our present policy and in directing the necessary actions to make it effective, to be carried out in a concerted fashion by US representatives in the field under Ambassador Lodge, as well as through Washington agencies concerned."

⁴ Not found.

⁵ Rusk and McNamara met alone with the President from 4 to 4:45 p.m., September 19, in an "off-the-record meeting." No account of this meeting has been found. (Kennedy Library, President's Log Book)

⁶ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

134. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Felt)¹

Saigon, September 19, 1963—7:47 p.m.

MAC J00 7536. Personal for Gen Taylor, Adm Felt and Gen Krulak. From Gen Harkins.

1. As everyone else seems to be talking, writing and confusing the issue here in Vietnam, it behooves me to also get into the act. From most of the reports and articles I read, one would say Vietnam and our programs here are falling apart at the seams. Well, I just thoroughly disagree.

2.

The RVN is divided into two parts, Saigon with its satellite Hue and the remainder of the country. In Saigon one can hear any imaginable rumor or grievance one wants to hear and I suppose could get better ones for a price.

Thank goodness I do not get to read the newspapers until they are at least three days old. If I got them as soon as you do, I would be afraid to go to work or I wouldn't know what to do. All is not black. No, far from it.

3.

As you know, our programs are pointed towards the RVNAF and the people in the countryside. None are designed for Saigon.

The programs for the Armed Forces are completed or on schedule. The ones in the country continue without let-up. Both are paying dividends.

4.

I remain as optimistic as ever, particularly on the military side and I firmly believe there is reason for optimism in some of the other spheres.

Here are some of the indicators.

- a. Martial law has been lifted.
- b. Press censorship relaxed.
- c. The rapid reaction by RVNAF in countering several larger than usual VC attacks and the impressive results obtained by the RVNAF counter forces as regards both VC killed and VC supplies and equipment captured.
- d. The voluntary movement by the heretofore reluctant Behnar Montagnards tribesmen in the Pleiku area seeking resettlement and government protection.
- 3. [e.] The obvious interest displayed at all levels of the RVNAF to get on with the war against the VC. This particularly apparent since the lifting of martial law.
- f. The obvious desire evidenced on the part of RVNAF personnel to further develop rapport and understanding with their US adviser counterparts.
- g. As reported in the most recent Task Force Saigon Weekly Program Report (Saigon A-204 to State 16 Sep)²
 - (1) Although business continued slow the shortened curfew (now relaxed) and lengthened business day allowed more general circulation of people throughout the area. Restaurants and theaters renewed evening activities and taxi and cyclo-posse were available until late.
 - (2) Rice and hog deliveries to Saigon from province not affected by martial law and local curfew. Small increase in daily rice deliveries over August. Hog deliveries only slightly less than before with wholesale price steady.
 - (3) Trend toward normal relations between USOM technicians and counterparts continued.
 - (4) USOM provincial representatives continue to report province programs outside Delta problem areas going well and Inter-Ministerial Committee efficiency returning to normal. Provincial operations normal or nearly so with exception of Thua Thien. Individual programs remained on schedule.
 - (5) All Corps have made comparable consistent progress during period in hamlet completions.
 - (6) GVN sponsored seed seminar this week in Saigon is latest step in establishing efficiency system for distribution of seeds to farmers.
 - (4) [7] Tam Giang irrigation project in Phu Yen Province officially opened. Project financed by GVN will provide water to irrigate some 2400 hectares of rice lands.

5. These and others are indications that our programs are moving. We must not stop them and let fourteen million people go down the Communist drain. Admittedly we are on the front-line and the VC are using every trick in their bag. Murders, ambush, propaganda, Buddhists, and school children all are part of their game. They know they're losing and are going to desperate ends to hang on. We can not give up now.

Incidentally President Diem accepted my recommendation and is moving the Ninth Division to the IV Corps beginning 19th Sept.

Had a long talk with Sec Thuan today. He's back in business and needed his batteries charged.

Also, through Thuan, sent Diem a letter³ pointing out several "musts" in the conduct of the war and asking him to direct his commanders to assume an all out offensive. Regards.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to Lodge. Received at 12:11 p.m. JCS sent it to the White House exclusive for Bundy; to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman; and to the CIA exclusive for Helms.

² Not printed. (*Ibid.*, Def 19 US-S VIET)

³ Not found.

135. Memorandum for the Record by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Washington, September 19, 1963.

SUBJECT

Visit of Former Ambassador Tran Van Chuong

1. Ex-Ambassador Tran Van Chuong called on me today at his request. The purpose was to warn me against the optimistic reports on the military situation coming from military officials in South Vietnam. He is convinced that the basic facts are quite different. He thinks that there can be no final victory with the Diem Government which is more disliked by the people of the country than was the government of Bao Dai.
2. He recited his resistance to the Diem program and his efforts to change the character of the Administration. In July 1962, he wrote a very strong letter to Diem urging him to become a political figurehead while retaining the position of President and giving the real political power to a Prime Minister. He resigned this year after seeing the ineffectiveness of his recommendations for change.
3. He stresses the predominant importance of Saigon, not only as the capitol and population center but also as being the "heart and brains" of South Vietnam. Hence, Diem's unpopularity in Saigon has a particular significance.
4. I told him that I hoped to revisit South Vietnam fairly soon and asked how I could learn the true situation, who were some senior civilians with whom I might talk and exchange views. Tran Van Chuong replied that it was impossible since it would be too dangerous for such civilians to communicate with me.
5. I urged him to think over the problem of a foreign official trying to understand the situation in Vietnam and to telephone me if he had any constructive suggestions.

MDT

¹ Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-186-69. Confidential.

136. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) to the Secretary of State¹

Washington, September 19, 1963.

SUBJECT

Country Team Assessment—Viet-Nam Situation

The following represents the views of the Country Team² or the great majority thereof in response to our Deptel 353 to Saigon of September 7, 1963,³ asking for an assessment of attitudes of a wide cross section of the Vietnamese population toward top GVN political and military leadership, toward the Viet Cong and continuation of the war, and toward the United States.

1.

Since May 8, and especially since August 21, discontent in Vietnamese society has been accompanied by a spread of fear, uncertainty and frustration regarding the future, and in some instances, transformed into disaffection. Morale has been badly hit, particularly among

- a. the top echelons of the Vietnamese Government;
- b. the civilian bureaucracy;
- c. the urban professionals;
- d. the intellectuals;
- e. the students;
- f. some levels of the police and security forces.

The military, thus far, have been the least affected.

2. There is overwhelming feeling among Vietnamese that
 - a. Ngo Dinh Nhu is the real power in the Vietnamese Government;
 - b. Mr. and Mrs. Nhu are mainly to blame for the disastrous course of events and must be ousted.
3. Diem and Nhu are generally considered “twins”, but considerable (nostalgic) hope remains that they may yet be separated and Diem retained thereafter as the head of a new government.

4. Discontent has in some cases become intense disaffection; but talk will be transformed into action only if the US encourages this and takes the lead.
5. The feeling is widespread that the US must provide stimulus and backing for the overthrow of the regime and construction of a new one. The US is regarded with hope, disappointment, and, more recently, with criticism and resentment. United States responsibility for the continued tenure of the Ngo family is repeatedly cited; similarly, the US is blamed for having enabled the regime to prevent the development of an alternative leadership.
6. Vice President Nguyen Ngoc Tho is considered a possible successor to Diem, but would require Vietnamese military backstopping. He is regarded as a good administrator, capable, honest, and a suitable titular head of state, but not as a strong man.
7. The generals are considered the group most likely to be able to bring about a change in the government; but even they will move only if the US prods them to do so.
8. The ideas of Buddhist leader Tri Quang do not go beyond overthrowing the present regime; he appears as a religious revolutionary with agitational ideas and potential, but without institutional or constructive ideas.
9. De Gaulle's neutralist proposals have been received by the Vietnamese with little interest or support.
- 10.

The Viet Cong is regarded with strong hostility. However, because the belief is growing that the US cannot be counted on, and the Viet Cong can, and that life under the DRV would be no worse than that under the Ngo regime, the Viet Cong are being mentioned as an undesirable, but possibly the only, alternative to the present government.

The Embassy adds, in its own overall commentary, that there is little question that continuation of the present situation will be increasingly exploited by the Viet Cong and will increasingly sap RVNAF capabilities.

11. The student uprisings are extremely serious, and have alarmed Vietnamese officials and military more than any other evidences of popular disaffection.

¹ Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, POL 15 Gov't. Secret. Drafted by Kattenburg and signed by Hilsman. A note on the source text indicates that Rusk saw it. Copies were sent to Ball, Harriman, Forrestal, Colby, William K. Bunce of USIA, Albert L. Whiting, Krulak, Heinz, U. Alexis Johnson, Rostow, and Manning.

² These views were reported to Washington in telegrams 470 to 477 from Saigon, all September 1. (All *ibid.*, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET, except telegram 472 from Saigon, *ibid.*, POL 18 S VIET) MACV did not concur with the assessment of the rest of the Country Team and sent its own more optimistic views in telegram JOL 7384 from Saigon, September 11. (*Ibid.*, POL S VIET)

³ Document 73.

137. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 20, 1963, 4 p.m.

555. For President only, pass White House directly, no other distribution whatever. Further to your CAP 63516.²

1. Here is what I have done in compliance with your paragraph 3:
 - a. I read pertinent parts to Chief of CAS and Chief of MAAG asking them to let me know of any programs which could be held up without impairing the war effort. I am not sure whether anything significant will be found in these two agencies.
 - b. I requested Chief of USOM to notify me of any of his programs which could be held up and which would give concern to Diem and Nhu without disrupting the Vietnamese economy.
2. Chief of USOM suggested holding up on technical assistance and dollar support for the communications program conducted by the Vietnamese Director of Information; and continue holding up for a very short time on support of the commercial import program. I stipulated that this last should not be held up so that it would in any way create inflation, panic, or injury to the standard of living of the masses.
3. When Vietnamese officials call to inquire about these two programs, they are to be told that President Diem will have to speak to me about it. If he asks me to come and see him, I will, of course, go-which will be the first time that I will have been asked to do him a favor. There will then be several different ways for me to handle the matter. I am thinking now of listening to his request that the program be set in motion again and then doing to him in reverse the kind of thing which he does to me; that is, launch into a long statement on something that interests me, to wit, how urgent it is for him to take action so that it will appear in America that there has been some real improvement in GVN.
4. Getting Diem and Nhu to bring about an improvement in the appearance of the GVN is a prime responsibility of mine, and I shall try to leave no stone unturned. I believed, however, that we might face a situation after the appropriation bill has been voted in which no coup d'etat has taken place and in which we are faced with the simple but unpleasant choice of pressing on vigorously with Diem and

Nhu or else not pressing on at all. Under these circumstances, I think we should definitely press on and that my job will then be to develop as much influence with Diem and Nhu as possible, to advise and guide them, and, when expedient, to do favors for them. For this reason, I do not want to burn any bridges without your knowledge and approval.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. Received at 4:13 a.m. and passed to the White House at 5:07 a.m. On another copy of this telegram, there is a marginal note indicating that the President saw it. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables)

² Document 125.

138. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 20, 1963, 5 p.m.

556. Following are highlights of statements made to U.S. officer September 18 by General "Big" Minh. Statements were touched off by officer's request for Minh's evaluation of Viet Cong situation:

1. Minh thought VC were gaining steadily in strength and 80 percent of population now have no basis for choice between GVN and VC.
2. Lifting of martial law was simply eyewash for Americans. The situation remains the same. Arrests were continuing, and Minh remarked that the two guardhouses outside his headquarters were full of prisoners.
3. Student problem had by no means been resolved and was in fact very grave. Minh said he knew that students were going over to VC but cited no numbers or facts in support.
4. Middle ranks of Army were badly disaffected and were asking for a coup. According to Minh, officers were not fighting aggressively because they do not have their heart in it. With the proper government, they would fight "four times harder."
5. Minh felt sure that Nhu was in charge. Said when he took military problems to Diem these days, Diem either referred him to Nhu or called Nhu in.
6. Minh claimed that every District Chief and Province Chief was Can Lao Party member and charged that these officials were demanding and receiving kick-backs from rural population on U.S. aid extended. Proceeds were going into party coffers. Archbishop Thuc, according to Minh, was "attending to everything but church business.

Minh gave impression of having thought very carefully about coup possibilities but gave no indication as to whether or not he might be actively planning a coup. In hypothetical terms, he said that coup would have to be carried out suddenly and with complete success, so as to leave no opportunity for Viet Cong exploitation and to avoid risk of civil war.

Asked by U.S. officer whether his visit embarrassed Minh, latter replied in the negative. He said that he had been told, like everyone else, to

stay away from Americans but order was not in writing and he had made it clear that he would not sacrifice his old friendships. He would be glad to see U.S. officer at any time.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Priority; Eyes Only. Received at 5:48 a.m. and passed to the White House.

139. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Felt)¹

Saigon, September 20, 1963—6:55 p.m.

MAC J00 7585. Ref A. Saigon to SecState 542.² B. Saigon to SecState 556.³ I had read ref A prior to a meeting with Sec Thuan this afternoon and among other things we discussed how the war was going, Strategic Hamlet program, Thompson report,⁴ and the wealth of rumors that were still going around Saigon. I said one of the rumors was that he (Thuan) wanted to resign and get out of the country. He categorically denied this and said it was fantastic. He said any such rumor that could be spread around deeply endangered his life. He said that he was discouraged for a time and that his health was not too good and that he said he thought he would like to have an Ambassador's post some place. He asked me to please try to "squench" even the discussion of such a rumor that he wanted to resign or that he could get anybody else to go with him.

Ref B (556) which is an unevaluated statement by General (Big) Minh: I have this to say—since I have known Big Minh a year and one-half, though I have a very high estimate of his leadership qualities, he has contributed nothing to the war effort here either as commander of the field command or as an advisor to the President. In fact, he has done nothing but complain to me about the government and the way it is handled ever since I have been here. As you know, Big Minh has been under suspicion since 1960 and has never been given real command of troops since that time and he has been kept in positions where people keep a close watch on him. My intelligence people, in analyzing his statement, feel this: that he might have been again attempting to probe the US position to elicit an expression of support for a coup. This was Minh's first meeting with Americans since the 21st of August and this might also explain his eagerness to communicate his views. The statement that 80 percent of the populace no longer supports the government can certainly not be confirmed. We have no evidence to indicate that numbers of students are turning in desperation to the VC, though there is some element of collusion between student group leaders and the National Liberation Front.

At the meeting today with all senior advisers, none evidenced any disaffection of the middle ranks.

As I have said before, you can get almost any viewpoint you want and some of these indicate there are still coup discussions going on among the military. We will continue to evaluate all statements as well as we are able.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Secret; Immediate; Personal. Also sent personal to Taylor. A note on the source text indicates that the President saw this cable. Received at the JCS at 9:54 a.m. The JCS relayed this message to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman; to CIA exclusive for Helms; and to the White House exclusive for Bundy.

² See [footnote 5, Document 130](#).

³ Document 138.

⁴ Not further identified.

140. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 20, 1963—7:40 p.m.

447. Eyes only for the Ambassador. No other distribution. Re your 544,² para 5. Although not sanguine our search any more successful than yours following recaps our thinking on possibilities for use of aid (additional to our 435)³ as means of exerting pressure on GVN for accomplishment our objectives without interfering seriously with war effort:

1. USOM Saigon could require written guarantees from GVN agencies that AID equipment provided hereafter not be used in actions of repression.
2. USOM Saigon could terminate support of those elements of the combat police and the GVN Director General of Information not being used against Viet Cong.
3. USOM Saigon could withhold participation in the hamlet militia leader training program so long as directed by Colonel Tung.
4. USOM and/or MAAG Saigon could withhold quarterly release of plasters to Department of Defense PsyWar for its publications pending positive indication these funds will not be used to support repression or publicize the Nhus favorably.
5. You could inform Diem that you have given instructions to Richardson to suspend immediately payments to all projects serving currently politically repressive activities.⁴
6. We recognize that such steps would mainly serve purpose of exerting psychological pressure on GVN and would of course represent little in way of economic pressure.
7. On the other hand, continued suspension of new PL 480 sales, new CIP allotments and further procurement authorization under existing allotments will not only constitute political pressure on GVN when Diem is at your discretion made aware of what we are doing, but also likely sooner or later to have economic consequences which may adduce further pressure on GVN. Economic consequences could be a) triggering speculation, hoarding, price rises not justified by current supply, budget, or reserve situation, or (b) actual supply shortages and decline plaster counterpart contributions to budget in 3-8 months as

present pipeline runs out. (Unfortunately we may thus unavoidably hurt our friends among Vietnamese people to some extent.)

8. You may also wish consider advisability of acquiring substantial cash resources in plasters for possible use in providing direct support to counterinsurgency program in provinces if that becomes desirable.⁵
9. In addition, DOD study among planning papers being pouched concludes that direct support of armies in field bypassing Saigon is technically feasible and line of communication could be so reoriented in about thirty days.
10. Our judgment is that continued inaction on aid matters (excepting necessary counterinsurgency) would not produce any immediate serious economic consequences because of size of pipeline and GVN reserves. On other hand, might generate significant psychological pressures on GVN thus strengthening your hand and general posture of the US with Vietnamese people.
11. Want to emphasize above is partial list. AID Washington staff has prepared a checklist of all possible AID actions assessed in increasing order of impact on GVN (included among the planning papers being pouched).⁶

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, AID (US) S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared with Forrestal, William Bundy, and Janow of AID. On another copy of this telegram there is a marginal note indicating that the President read it. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables)

² Document 130.

³ Telegram 435, September 18, provided the Embassy in Saigon with current thinking on the status of U.S. aid to South Vietnam. Since August 22, the telegram noted, all new significant aid to Vietnam was being withheld as well as travel of AID personnel to Vietnam. The telegram described this action as a "slow fuse" which could eventually have massive impact on supply and the budget of South Vietnam. It was another thing to consider cutting "the continuous almost daily flow of aid based on earlier commitments and orders." The Department asked Embassy personnel to discuss with the USOM Director all "pending aid program actions." (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET)

⁴ In telegram 609 from Saigon, September 28, the Embassy submitted comments by Richardson on paragraph 5. Richardson noted that the

number of CIA programs being used by the Diem government for repressive political activities was "actually rather limited." Any cutback by CIA, in Richardson's opinion, would "have only a pin-prick effect unless accompanied by cutbacks in the programs of the larger American agencies in Saigon." (*Ibid.*)

⁵ In telegram 609, September 28, the Embassy submitted comments by Richardson on paragraph 8. Richardson stated the CIA capability for purchase of plasters "was not unlimited" and he doubted direct payments could be made to the provinces, bypassing the central government. The only case in which such a plan might work was if a Corps Commander declared his opposition to the central government. (*Ibid.*)

⁶ Not found.

141. Editorial Note

On September 21, 1963, Secretary of Defense McNamara responded to President Kennedy's queries about the veracity of the article in *The New York Times* by David Halberstam, September 16 (see [Document 117](#)). McNamara's signed memorandum to the President, September 19, reads as follows:

"In your memorandum dated 16 September 1963, you inquired as to the accuracy of subject article and whether there is a split between our military and the Vietnamese on the strategic hamlet program in the Delta area.

"Attached is an analysis, based upon reports received from the U.S. Military Assistance Command, as well as country team statistics. It indicates that there is no rift between our military and the Vietnamese on the program and that the article contains other inaccuracies." (Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 69 A 3131, Vietnam-1)

The attached analysis referred to by McNamara was 19 pages long and dated September 20. In it, the Department of Defense maintained that the United States and South Vietnam differed over strategic hamlets in the Camau peninsula and the Delta, but agreed on goals and strategy for the program. According to the analysis, Halberstam underestimated the effectiveness of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam, overemphasized Viet Cong successes, and failed to mention the supposed 4 to 1 casualty ratio in favor of the government forces. This analysis is published in *Declassified Documents*, 1982, 446B.

There is a more general unattributed analysis of Halberstam's views of the strategic hamlet program in the Delta, dated September 17, at the Kennedy Library. This document states that Halberstam's conclusions are "overly lugubrious" and "should be treated with reserve!" According to the analysis, joint U.S.-GVN strategic planning called for a holding action in the Delta until other corps were sufficiently secure to allow transfer of forces there. In effect, the analysis maintained that the military situation in the Delta was not getting markedly worse, but the battles to dislodge the long-entrenched Viet Cong were yet to be fought. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous)

The Central Intelligence Agency prepared on September 26 a memorandum for McCone, entitled "David Halberstam's Reporting on South Vietnam." In this analysis the CIA drew the following conclusions:

"A review of all the articles written by Mr. Halberstam since June indicates that he is by and large accurate in terms of the facts that he includes in his articles. The conclusions he draws from his facts, plus the emphasis of his reporting, however, tend to call his objectivity into question. Since June, the great majority of Halberstam's articles have dealt with the Buddhist crisis in South Vietnam and the injurious effects of the crisis on the struggle with the Viet Cong.

"In his almost invariably pessimistic reports, Halberstam makes liberal use of phrases 'some Americans,' 'informed Vietnamese', or 'lower (or higher) ranking Americans,' etc. Such sourcing is impossible to refute. However, other observers writing from South Vietnam indicate that large segments of the American military community have been and still remain optimistic about the course of the war. Such optimistic sources are almost never quoted by Mr. Halberstam." (*Ibid.*, Halberstam Article, 9/63)

142. Memorandum From the President to the Secretary of Defense (McNamara)¹

Washington, September 21, 1963.

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

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

I am providing you separately with a letter from me to President Diem² which Ambassador Lodge and you should discuss and which the Ambassador should deliver on the occasion of a call on President Diem if after discussion and reference to me I conclude that such a letter is desirable.

In my judgment the question of the progress of the contest in South Vietnam is of the first importance and in executing this mission you

should take as much time as is necessary for a thorough examination both in Saigon and in the field.

John F. Kennedy

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, Report 10/2/63. Top Secret. McGeorge Bundy sent Rusk a copy of this memorandum under cover of a memorandum, September 21, which reads as follows:

"This is the McNamara instruction as the President finally approved it today. Bob asked me to take back to him the additional sentence which you and I discussed yesterday, saying that his notes showed that the President specifically approved this addition. I did take it back to the President and he did approve it, although I presented the arguments against it as you and I have discussed them. I don't think it's a major matter." (Department of State, Central Files, ORG 7 OSD)

There is no indication on the source text to which sentence Bundy is referring. Attached to another copy is a draft of this memorandum with revisions in Bundy's handwriting. The major revision is the insertion at the end of the first paragraph of the sentence beginning 'If the prognosis in your judgment'² There are two other minor revisions in Bundy's hand. The first is the insertion, in the second sentence of the second paragraph, of the phrase, ', consult fully with Ambassador Lodge on, and the second is the substitution in the first and only sentence of the third paragraph of a call', for your formal call." (Kennedy Library, National security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous) This memorandum was sent to Saigon eyes only for Lodge in an unnumbered telegram, September 22. (Department of state, Central Files, POL US-MCNAMARA) Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, pp. 551-552.

² See [Document 147](#).

143. Memorandum for the Record¹

Washington, September 23, 1963, 10 a.m.

SUBJECT

Meeting on McNamara/Taylor Mission to South Vietnam

Present at the meeting at 10:00 a.m. this date were: President, Secretary McNamara, General Taylor, Acting Secretary Ball, Mr. McGeorge Bundy

The President signed the draft instructions to Secretary McNamara² and then supplemented those instructions by a number of comments.

1. He thought that it would in fact be necessary for Secretary McNamara to see President Diem twice. In these visits he should press the need for reform and change as a pragmatic necessity and not as a moral judgment. If the Secretary and General Taylor reach the conclusion from their own investigations that such change is essential for the winning of the war, they should press this conclusion strongly.
2. The President did not think that threats to cut off aid were likely to be effective. Since in fact only small changes were likely to be made in the immediate future, it would be better to let such adjustments speak for themselves.
3. The President thought that Diem would undoubtedly be aware of U.S. connections with his opposition and that Secretary McNamara and General Taylor should simply avoid such matters and concentrate upon the positive accomplishments of the last decade and upon the very high level of U.S. support and cooperation which has characterized the period as a whole. He also thought that General Taylor in particular could emphasize the affirmative decision of 1961 and the hopeful prospects as they appeared a year ago, as against the graver situation which has now developed.
4. The President thought it would be desirable for some member of Secretary McNamara's party-perhaps General Taylor-to press these same points with brother Nhu separately, especially if President Diem did not include his brother in meetings with Secretary McNamara. It would be important that the setting and background of any such meeting should be such as to minimize the danger of its use by Nhu as a proof of continuing American support for him.
5. The President asked Secretary McNamara if the members of his expedition could be counted on for security vis-a-vis the press, and Secretary McNamara assured him that he planned to take most energetic measures to prevent leaks by members of his mission.

6. Mr. Ball suggested, and the President agreed, that a further effort be made to emphasize to the SVN government the folly of sending Mme. Nhu to the U.S. at this time. (In this connection the President noted that Mme. Nhu had now included "junior U.S. officers" under her fire; he remarked that as long as she had limited her criticism to the President, her opposition had not been serious but that an attack on subordinates of the Pentagon was obviously intolerable.)
7. The President emphasized to Secretary McNamara the importance of getting to the bottom of differences in reporting from U.S. representatives in Vietnam. Secretary McNamara agreed that this was a major element in his mission and said that his own judgment was more and more that the Ambassador and his associates were thinking in terms of the future course of the struggle in the light of the present behavior of the regime, while General Harkins and the military were reporting on the present or very recent military situation and discounting the possible impact of political events on the future course of operations. (This estimate coincided precisely with what the President himself had said some days earlier after reading Lodge's major cable 478 from Saigon.)³
8. The President was sure that Diem would spend a good deal of time on his troubles with the press. He thought Secretary McNamara should agree that the press has not always been right in its accounts. (The President thought there was a great deal of truth in Joe Alsop's column that morning⁴ which dealt with the zealous spirit of criticism and complaint among certain newspapermen in Saigon.) But the only way to deal with such press criticism was to get on with the job. "The way to confound the press is to win the war."
9. General Taylor thought it would be useful to work out a time schedule within which we expect to get this job done and to say plainly to Diem that we were not going to be able to stay beyond such and such a time with such and such forces, and that the war must be won in this time period. The President did not say "yes" or "no" to this proposal.
10. It was agreed that the President would send out to Saigon a draft letter to Diem, and in signing the memorandum of instructions he said that he believed the question of delivery of the letter could be settled by the Secretary with Ambassador Lodge, without further reference to him for approval.

McG.B.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, ORG 7 OSD. Top Secret. Drafted by McGeorge Bundy who sent a copy to Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman under cover of a memorandum, September 23, which noted: "The last sentence of the first paragraph of the instructions was inserted by the President after I reported the divergent views on it to him at Bob McNamara's request." The meeting was held at the White House.

² Document 142.

³ Document 86.

⁴ Joseph Alsop's column, "Matter of Fact," entitled "The Crusaders," appeared in The Washington Post, September 23.

144. Letter From the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)¹

Washington, September 23, 1963.

DEAR CABOT: I am taking advantage of Mike Forrestal's safe hands to add four rather personal points.

The first is that I have the feeling that more and more of the town is coming around to our view and that if you in Saigon and we in the Department stick to our guns the rest will also come around. As Mike will tell you, a determined group here will back you all the way.

I think you are probably right in the judgment that no pressures—even a cut-off in aid—will cause Diem and Nhu to make the changes we desire and that what we must work for is a change in government. But I also think that selective aid cuts are the first step in putting starch in the spaghetti—which is the second point I wanted to make.

The third point is the reasons behind this judgment. High-ranking generals in a country like Viet-Nam are reluctant to set loose the forces that will follow a change in government. Inevitably in such a period of flux, able colonels and majors will displace at least some of them and they know it. Thus, generals are not going to move until the forces below them—the middle-grade officers—generate enough pressure to convince the generals that they must act first. The only way to generate this broad pressure from below, it seems to me, is for the U.S. to maintain its posture of public disapproval and to make this disapproval real and credible by cuts directed at what we disapprove. (At the same time we should be preparing for a quick reorientation of the LOC's to support the field units and programs directly, bypassing the Saigon Government entirely.)

My fourth and final point is entirely personal—to say that you have handled an incredibly difficult task superbly. My very heartiest and most sincere congratulations.²

“But I agree with you on the United States maintaining its posture of silent disapproval. In fact I have never realized before in my life how

much attention silence could attract. As you know, Madame Nhu is attacking me in her newspaper for being so silent." (*Ibid.*)

Good Luck,

Roger Hilsman³

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam. Top Secret; Personal and Private. Drafted by Hilsman.

² Lodge responded in a letter to Hilsman, September 26, which reads in part as follows: "We are working on selective aid cuts without too much confidence in their effectiveness.

³ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

145. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff¹

Washington, September 23, 1963.

Forrestal asked if there were any last minute instructions. Harriman said to reserve State's position. Say they can't speak for State.

Harriman mentioned that he listened to CBS this morning and got the flavor of the lady who is coming here.² He said he was worried. He said she said she was a true friend because she was telling us where we made our mistakes.

Harriman said it was important that no one official see her.

Harriman said he thought he would talk to one or two people about this. He said he would talk to Al Friendly.³

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Dolores Perruso.

² Madame Nhu.

³ Harriman's conversation with Friendly of CBS is not printed. (Memorandum of telephone conversation, September 23; Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations)

146. Memorandum for the Record by Lieutenant Colonel Sidney Berry, Jr.¹

En Route to Saigon, September 23, 1963.

SUBJECT

Secretary McNamara's Instructions to Party Delivered Aboard Plane, 1230-1330 (EDST) 23 September 1963

1. *Mission.* Mr. McNamara read the President's memorandum of instruction² and commented that the essence of the mission is to appraise the effectiveness of the SVN military effort to defeat the Viet Cong and to evaluate present and future prospects for success. If the prognosis is not hopeful, what action must be taken by SVN and what must USG do to lead SVN to that action?
2. *Letter to Diem.* The President will forward to Saigon a letter to Diem³ which Lodge will deliver when Lodge and McNamara call on Diem. Letter will be presented to Diem on judgment of Lodge and McNamara. Not necessary to refer decision to President.
3. *Press Statements.* While mission of party is inevitably broader than military, all press and public statements must emphasize military nature of the mission. Members of party should not mention publicly political aspects of trip.
4. *Congressional Testimony.* Immediately upon return, Mr. McNamara and General Taylor expect to be called to testify before Congress. Their testimony must be based on thorough investigation and extensive field trip.
5. *Field Trips.* Extensive field trips are necessary to build acceptable public posture. Each team member should spend maximum time possible in field. Mr. McNamara and General Taylor will spend most of their time traveling. Mr. Colby will spend most of his time in Saigon. Mr. Forrestal and Mr. Sullivan should alternate working in Saigon and traveling with McNamara-Taylor. So should Mr. Bundy and General Krulak.
6. *Overall Assignment to Members of Party.* Mr. McNamara make following assignments:
 - a. Mr. Bundy: Edit report.
 - b. Mr. Forrestal: Assist Mr. Bundy edit report.
 - c. Mr. Colby: Evaluate intelligence.
 - (1) Why do so many conflicting intelligence reports exist? Evaluate views of individuals and agencies.

- (2) Appraise trends of SVN society.
 - d. Mr. Sullivan: Evaluate conflicting views of US personnel in SVN.
 - e. General Krulak: Determine attitude of GVN and US military.
7. *Individuals to be contacted.*
- a. Mr. Forrestal:
 - American businessmen—
 - Lincoln Brownell
 - George Calfo
 - b. Mr. Sullivan:
 - Ambassadors—
 - Chinese
 - Australian
 - Philippine
 - French British
 - Jacques Poulton (French businessman)
 - Thuc (Dean of Law School)
 - Labor Leaders
 - c. Mr. Bundy:
 - ICC Members—
 - Cox (Canadian)
 - Goburdhan (Indian)
 - d. Mr. Colby:
 - SVN businessmen
 - SVN labor leaders
 - e. Gen. Krulak:
 - British and Australian Military Mission—
 - Serong
 - Cable questions to Thompson through Serong
- 8.

Questions to be answered. All members of the group should seek answers to the following questions. However, primary responsibility for ascertaining answers is assigned to individual cited.

- a. (Colby) Have key elements of SVN power base moved away from Diem? What are these elements? How far away from Diem have they moved? What is their likely future trend?
- b. (Colby) How serious is the student movement? Is it voluntary? If not, how organized? Who organized it? What of its future?
- c. (Krulak) Is there increasing unrest among the military? Has the situation changed since May? How? What of the future? (Sullivan will also assess views on this question held within the US Embassy.)

- d. (Forrestal) How has the SVN economy been affected by the recent unrest? What of the future?
- e. (Sullivan and Colby) What of the civil servants? How is their morale? What of the future?
- f. (Bundy and Sullivan) What is the true picture concerning political control of the village and hamlets? Do we have an accurate way of measuring this? If not, how can we measure accurately the picture of the situation in each hamlet? Does the USOM report of-the situation in the hamlets jibe with the Jacob Coat chart?⁴
- g. (Forrestal) Can our military and economic aid be used as a lever to move Diem government to follow our recommendations? If so, how?
- h. (Sylvester) What can be done to improve relationships with the press and reporting by the press? Have other national presses followed the same line as US press?
- i. (All) Is GVN government operated effectively as compared with the past?
- j. (All) What changes have occurred in the physical and mental health of Diem and Nhu?
- k. (All) Has there been a shift in relationship of Diem and Nhu? If so, what? How does their relationship today compare with that of the past?
- l. (All) Is it likely that Diem can retain effective political power?
- m. (All) If he can, can we expect the military effort to succeed? Or will it deteriorate? (This is the crucial question.)

Mr. McNamara enjoined all members of party to list additional questions and give them to Mr. Bundy for consolidation and use in guiding inquiry and writing final report.

9. *General guidance.*

- a. Effort will be made to hold daily staff meeting, probably in early morning. Will be conducted by Mr. McNamara or Mr. Colby, whichever plans to be in Saigon for day.
- b. Single reporting system to Washington to be in effect for entire party, perhaps daily reporting cables. Any differences of opinion will be cited in group cable.
- c. Inform Mr. Sylvester of all press contacts—formal or informal—in advance when possible. Always have third party present.
- d. All members of party make daily memoranda for record. Give to Mr. Bundy for use in preparing final report.

10. *Final Report.*

- a. Must be completed before return to Washington.

- b. Guides for report are proposed outline prepared by General Krulak and master list of questions consolidated by Mr. Bundy.
- c. To maximum extent, report will be worked out in Saigon. Layover in Honolulu is scheduled for completion of report.
- d. Should there be any dissenting views, they will be cited in the final report.

11.

Summary.

The job is to appraise the course of the war, the present and future of the Diem government, and to determine how the US can best influence the SVN government.

Sidney B. Berry, Jr.
Lt. Col, USA
Military Assistant

¹ Source: Washington Federal Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, Back Up Documents and Notes, 9/25/63-Trip to SVN.
Secret.

² Document 142.

³ See [Document 147](#).

⁴ Not further identified.

147. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 24, 1963—9:25 p.m.

476. Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge and Secretary McNamara. Herewith text of letter from President to President Diem. President's own judgment is that this letter is not appropriate and not likely to be productive unless in your judgment after further consultation situation is so serious that Presidential pressure of this sort is essential. President does not believe that this kind of letter can be used more than once in a situation of this sort and unless you disagree, his belief is that McNamara can make these points for him orally with less likelihood of personal offense.

Alternatively, somewhat softer language may remove this difficulty. Please tell us what you both think.²

Letter begins:

"Dear Mr. President:

1. I am sending you this letter because of the extreme gravity of the situation which now confronts our two countries in their relations with each other. For us in the United States, difficult and painful decisions cannot long be deferred, and I know that you on your side have problems of similar gravity. Moreover, it is clear to me as I work on this matter that many of its difficulties arise from problems in assessing the real facts of the situation. Both of our Governments, for different reasons, face great difficulties on this score. And so I think it may be important and helpful for you to know accurately just how the situation now appears to me. In return, I shall greatly value the most candid expression of your own assessment, and it may well be that you and I between us can work out a new understanding in place of the present troubled, confused and dangerous relationship between our Governments.
2. At the outset, let me state plainly that the central purpose of my Government in all of its relations with your country is that the Communists should be defeated in their brazen effort to capture your country by force and fraud of all varieties. What

we do and do not do, whether it seems right or wrong to our friends, is always animated by this central purpose. In all that it does in its relations with your country, the United States Government gives absolute priority to the defeat of the Communists.

3. This purpose, in a general way, has been a part of American policy toward your country for many years, but as you know it took a new shape and clarity at the end of 1961. At that time, in light of the very unsatisfactory situation in Laos, and in view of the increasing efforts then being made by the Viet Cong, I sent two of my most trusted associates on a careful mission of inquiry to your country. This mission of General Taylor and Mr. Rostow was to give me the best possible judgment of the course of the struggle in South Vietnam and the prospect of success. Their comprehensive report convinced me, first, that the situation was indeed very serious, and second, that by appropriate and determined action your Government and ours together could find a way to victory. Our two Governments then worked out together, and you and I as their leaders formally approved, a new level of effort and cooperation. And I think it is fair to say that my Government has put forth its fullest efforts to achieve these goals ever since.
4. By the hardest kind of joint endeavor, in which of course your people have borne the heavier and the more immediate responsibility, the contest against the Communists in the last year and a half has gradually but steadily turned in our favor. New levels of alertness and skill were developed in the forces of your country; and the essential program of strategic hamlets was pressed forward with steadily increasing energy and speed. Each of us, I know, pays close attention to our reports from all over the country on the course of the struggle against the Viet Cong, and I am sure that these reports agree on the basic proposition that the war has been going well in a considerable portion of your country, at least until very recently.
5. In the last four months, by a series of events which neither you nor I can have wished and whose impact is surely a matter of equal regret to us both, a new and grave set of difficulties has developed. It is not my purpose here to recount in detail events with which you yourself are familiar, nor even to repeat expressions of concern, which you have heard many times from Ambassador Nolting and Ambassador Lodge, on the existing situation and dangers within your country.

6. It may well be your view that American opinion has been misled on these recent events, and I recognize that this is always a possibility in a world in which the accurate judgment of distant happenings is difficult. But that leads me to urge upon you as strongly as I can that the only way to correct this difficulty is to allow more and not less reporting by Americans and by other newsmen in your country. If there is one principle upon which my people are united, by Constitutional commitment, conviction, and tradition, it is that the way to get at the truth is to let people see for themselves—regardless of the irritations and criticism that a free press inevitably produces.
7. I must stress that, as I found it necessary to say publicly three weeks ago, we in our Government are gravely troubled by the danger that some of the methods used by some members of your Government may be creating a situation in which it will not be possible to sustain public support in Vietnam for the struggle against the Communists. What I must make clear is the effect recent events are having upon the situation here in the United States.
8. At the present time it is a fact that unless there can be important changes and improvements in the relations between the Government and people in your country, opinion in the United States, both in the public and in the Congress, will make it impossible for me to continue without change the great cooperative programs which we have been pressing together since 1961. I have said publicly that we do not wish to cut off our aid programs at this time, but it would be wrong for me not to let you know that a change is inevitable unless the situation in Vietnam takes a major visible and credible turn for the better.
9. At a minimum, and within a short period of time, it will become necessary for this Government to take actions which make it clear that American cooperation and American assistance will not be given to or through individuals whose acts and words seem to run against the purpose of genuine reconciliation and unified national effort against the Communists. Otherwise, it will become impossible for us to keep on with our major effort in support of your country. Unless I can show the American people that the United States is wholly dissociated from the public figures and public acts which have raised grave questions here, I clearly cannot ask the support of the American people and the Congress for the central effort.

10. There is much more that needs to be talked out between our two countries on these grave matters. I am asking Ambassador Lodge, as my personal representative, to express my views to you in complete frankness and to be at your disposal for further discussion. I have also instructed Secretary McNamara and General Taylor to review and to report to me on the present military situation. What Ambassador Lodge says to you has my explicit authorization and approval; I have given him complete authority in all aspects of United States operations in South Vietnam, and I rely upon his judgment. Of course I shall also welcome a direct expression of your personal views in a message to me at any time.
11. I repeat that it remains the central purpose of the United States in its friendly relations with South Vietnam to defeat the aggressive designs of the Communists. But I must also repeat that this purpose can only be achieved if major steps are speedily taken to remove the obstacles that have so seriously and regrettably impaired our cooperative effort." *Ends.*

Ball

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET-US. Top Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared in draft with Harriman and McGeorge Bundy. Repeated to USUN eyes only for Secretary Rusk.

² In telegram 593 from Saigon, September 25, Lodge and McNamara transmitted their views. The telegram reads as follows:

"We both agree with the President's conclusion. Situation is very serious but is not likely to be influenced by the delivery of a letter from the President to Diem and, therefore, we recommend against transmitting one to him." (*Ibid.*, POL 1 S VIET-US)

148. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 25, 1963—4:24 p.m.

478. Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge. Para 2 your 555.² We have been giving careful thought to your views re desirability avoiding actions on aid which would hurt standard of living of masses. We believe continued holding up of commercial import programs and new PL 480 sales will have greatest effect on monetized sector of economy, limited effects on less monetized sector, and little or no effects on non-monetized sector.

We would accordingly expect that effects on mass of rural people who subsist largely on what they produce (except for textiles) would be minimal. In cities prices almost all items consumed except domestically produced foodstuffs could be expected to rise, but again we would estimate that these foodstuffs (rice, nouc man and fish) represent major items in budgets of mass of people. We would anticipate in case of key item of rice that GVN would in interest its own political position endeavor keep prices under control through export licensing restrictions, as it has traditionally done in recent years whenever rice prices threatened to rise.

If contrary to expectations aid suspension did result in sharp price rises for little man perhaps effects could be offset by expanded program of PL 480, Title II, relief operations in countryside. Could such operations be administered in cities through private organizations like Catholic Relief Services and analogous Buddhist organizations to prevent channeling relief supplies through GVN?

Ball

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, AID (US) S VIET Top Secret, Priority. Drafted by Mendenhall; cleared by Barnett, Bundy, and in substance by Janow of AID; and approved by Hilsman.

² Document 137.

149. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, September 26, 1963.

1222. 1. Following is account of half hour [*less than 1 line not declassified*] meeting with Gen. Khiem morning 26 Sept at latter's request. Khiem explained he holding these meetings at direction of Gen. Duong Van Minh who wants to keep this channel open on continuing basis. Khiem in turn reports contents of conversations to Minh and to Minh only. [*less than 1 line not declassified*] Khiem pleased there no leaks so far.

2. Khiem cited recent Viet Cong show of strength in battlefield, where ARVN losses for first time almost as heavy as Viet Cong's. He added that through recent operations mounted by Col. Phnoc of ARVN J-2 (*Comment:* From other sources known to have been in progress for past few weeks) evidence is mounting steadily that VC very strong, have thoroughly completed plan and have assets in place for takeover attempt in Saigon should any major disturbance occur.

3. Khiem aware that coup planning by "civilians" continues. "Civilians" of course not aware of evidence of Viet Cong strength in possession of Generals nor can they be told.

4. Thus while Generals (i.e., Minh, Khiem, and Khanh) have not abandoned contingency (unspecified) planning for later action should it be necessary, they now firmly determined not attempt overthrow Diem pending latter's decision on governmental changes requested by Generals (see Saig-40 IN 21 114).² Khiem now somewhat optimistic that Diem will go along. Khiem indirectly set date of 4 Oct as Generals' deadline for Diem's acceptance of Generals' recommendations.

5. Optimism stems from fact that Generals feel Diem now accepting grave danger posed by VC which direct result of Diem's wrong policies in past and mistakes made in governmental structure up to present.

6. Once in possession of key ministries (at one point desirability of Big Minh for Defense and Gen. Don for Interior discussed) and with clear lines in the chain of command from Defense to sector chiefs in military

field and from Interior to province chiefs who would have no say so on military operations, Generals confident nation will be in position effectively to fight threats from within and from DRV (Khiem mentioned that Generals harping with Diem on very real threat from without and Generals opine this probably decisive factor in Diem's present tendency to go along with Generals recommendations).

7. Diem has already taken one step desired by Generals by signing some three or four days ago an order specifically placing Col. Tung and his Special Forces High Command directly under Joint Chiefs of [General] Staff. How effectively this order will be implemented should become evident in very near future ([*less than 1 line not declassified*] commented that JCS could well start with inquiry as Tung's disposal of funds available to him).

8. Diem has also taken another action which pleases the Generals by shipping Dr. Tuyen out of the country.³ Khiem considers Tuyen one of Nhu's men most responsible for ineffectiveness of civilian organs in fight against Viet Cong.

9. In somewhat daydreaming comment on how new government would function, Khiem said that with all Dept posts in hands of military, Counsellor Nhu's influence on conduct of affairs of nation will be minimal.

10. *Field comment*: We do not share Khiem's belief that Diem will accept and introduce recommendations made by the General Officers to the extent hoped for by Khiem.

¹ Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, South Vietnam Policy Files, September 16-30. 1963. Secret. There is no time of transmission on the source text.

² Document 119.

³ As the Republic of Vietnam's diplomatic representative to the United Arab Republic.

150. Report by the Secretary of Defense (McNamara)¹

Saigon, September 26, 1963.

REPORT OF McNAMARA 26 SEPTEMBER 63 INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR SMITH²

Smith, a professor at a leading American University, speaks Vietnamese fluently, is an oriental scholar, possesses wide contact among the leaders of both North and South Vietnam, and in the course of his daily work has access to transcripts of NVN radio broadcasts and to personal letters and other documents smuggled out of NVN. He is just completing a visit to SVN, having last visited the country in 1960 and 1953. During this trip he did not travel extensively outside of Saigon. In a long interview with McNamara he stated:

1. He brought with him to SVN a belief that we could probably manage to get along with Diem and it would be dangerous to make a change. After several weeks here, he has changed his mind.
2. Diem has aged terribly since 1960. He is slow mentally.
3. Nhu is a person with his back to the wall; he has spread the fear of arrest in non-political figures throughout all segments of Saigon; he is in a panic and has reached a stage of desperation.
4. Diem would not last 24 hours without Nhu who handles the bribes and manipulates the power base necessary for his survival. Nhu would not last 24 hours without the cloak of Diem's prestige. Each knows his need for the other.
5. It is impossible to liberalize the regime. Diem is incapable of changing. Therefore we must choose between winning with the regime as it is or supporting a change to another.
6. For years the public has been criticizing the regime but has done so behind their hands. Now the criticism is open, by people in the streets, and participated in by soldiers and policemen.
7. The treatment of the Buddhists has particularly stuck in the gullets of all class of Vietnamese. They are shocked by the use of troops on sacred ground. It has struck deeper than anything else the regime has done and the action disgusts Catholics and Buddhists alike. There is no Buddhist-Catholic clash. There has been no formal Buddhist organization in the past; suddenly people have been organized with press handouts, etc. There was latent opposition to the regime

- throughout the country which crystallized around the Buddhists after the Hue incident. It is clearly a political and not a religious movement.
8. The first point to study carefully is: Can we win with this regime. He believes we cannot. Then we must face the question of what is going to replace it. Any movement away from the regime is extremely risky. Neither the students nor the Buddhists can overthrow the government. Only a military coup or an assassination will be effective and one or the other is likely to occur soon. In such circumstances we have a 50% chance of getting something better.
 9. The Ambassador's policy of silence has won approval everywhere except in the palace.
 10. Thompson said last week the strategic hamlet program has proven it will work. The NVN broadcasts have attacked nothing as much as the hamlet program.
 11. Through independent sources he has confirmed that Nhu told Alsop what Alsop reported Nhu said³ and that the NVN have approached Nhu through the French as Nhu reported.
 12. A colonel in the Army, a mutual friend of Nhu and the professor, reports that a few days ago Nhu inquired how the Army would react to negotiations with the NVN. The colonel told Nhu that he would not live 24 hours after the start of such negotiations.
 13. If the Communists take over control of SVN, not another political leader in all of Asia will place any confidence in the world of the West. Indeed, the loss of confidence will not be limited to Asian leaders.
 14. The American government cannot do anything other than to either publicly support Diem or keep our mouths shut. If we follow the latter policy, a coup will probably take place within four weeks. It will be a gamble as to who will take over power after an interim military government.
 15. Professors at the University in Saigon report life has been hell; if the University is reopened the students will be out on the streets and the Dean of the Literary School will be with them.
 16. Nhu is putting more and more people into jail and tension is continuing to rise. As tension rises it will eventually affect the morale of the troops. The elimination of the curfew and martial law have been accompanied by increasing arrests in the middle of the night. The jails have never been as full.
 17. Coup plotting by the US would defeat its own end. We would end up with a government tarred with the reputation of an American puppet.
 18. The VC have not taken advantage of the period of political instability because their political leadership is poor and NVN facing a disastrous

food shortage wishes an accommodation with SVN.

19. It is soft-headed to believe that "democracy" will work under today's conditions in SVN. Many of the Diem regime's repressive measures would be continued by a successor regime. But the people will tolerate them for a time if the government will explain why they are imposed and when they may be lifted. Many in SVN today talk of a choice between perpetual repression under Diem or perpetual repression under Communists.
20. Many in SVN have been puzzled by the US attitude. The government has not spoken with one voice. If the US government, following my return, says nothing to support the Diem regime, an explosion will occur within 2, 3, or 4 weeks.

Robert S. McNamara⁴

¹ Source: Washington National Record Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, Back-up Documents and Notes, 9/25/63—Trip to SVN. Secret.

² According to William P. Bundy, who accompanied McNamara to Vietnam, Professor Smith is a pseudonym. Bundy recalls that "Smith," who was also in Saigon at the time, "was a long-standing student and writer on Vietnam who had been a totally strong supporter of Diem up to that point." Bundy thinks that "Smith's" opinions carried "special weight" because of his previous support for Diem. He remembers that it was his impression at the time that "Smith's" testimony had "considerable weight with McNamara." (Department of State, Office of the Historian, Vietnam Interviews, William R Bundy, June 26, 1984)

³ See [footnote 2, Document 151](#).

⁴ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

151. Memorandum Prepared for the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)¹

Washington, September 26, 1963.

SUBJECT

Possible Rapprochement Between North and South Vietnam

1. *Summary.* The information, rumors and interviews on which Joseph Alsop's article in the 18 September Washington Post² was based are but the most recent signs that the GVN, the DRV, and the French may have been engaged of late in exploring the possibilities of some kind of North-South rapprochement. It is highly unlikely that any such explorations seriously concern imminent reunification, since Hanoi's frequently stated conditions for unification would entail the capitulation of the GVN and the handing over of South Vietnam to the Communist North. We consider the chances less than even that the GVN is now seriously interested in some form of rapprochement of lesser dimensions than reunification—e.g., *de facto cease-fire, formal cease-fire, or some variant of neutralization*. Nevertheless, there is sufficient possibility of serious Ngo family interest in such latter rapprochement to merit continuing close attention. A variety of motives could induce (or may have already induced) the Ngo's to explore the possibilities of rapprochement with Hanoi: (a) a desire to develop their own "sanction" to counter threats of US aid cuts and provide the GVN some maneuverability in face of US pressures; (b) a general interest in maximizing available options during a crisis period (e.g., one in which they might find themselves losing the military support necessary to prevent total defeat); (c) and a new willingness to listen to long-standing French arguments or overtures. We would expect such exploratory activity to subside if US/GVN relations or the course of the war against the Viet Cong should improve—and, conversely, to increase if either of these should further deteriorate.
2. *The Alsop article.* On the basis of information available to us, Alsop's facts would appear to be essentially correct, but his conclusions should be examined in the perspective of considerations he does not mention. A chain of events somewhat similar to that which Alsop recounts occurred last year: In March 1962, Ho Chi Minh indicated in an interview with Wilfred Burchett his interest in a peaceful solution to the Vietnam problem. (It should be noted that the last confirmed visit of Burchett to North Vietnam occurred in March 1962. Hence it is

possible that Alsop is referring to the 1962 visit, not a more recent one.)³ In September 1962, the Indian chairman of the ICC reported that Ho had said he was prepared to extend the hand of friendship to Diem ("a patriot") and that the North and South might possibly initiate several steps toward a *modus vivendi*, including an exchange of members of divided families. There is an appreciable difference, however, in the GVN response to the 1962 situation and its present behavior. Though rumors of some form of contact between Nhu and the Viet Cong have been extant for years, the existence of such contacts has heretofore been denied. Now, however, Nhu acknowledges contacts with the North and has dropped transparent hints that the GVN would not necessarily refuse to consider overtures from Hanoi.

3. Although none of the recent rumors and speculations concerning an arrangement for accommodation between the DRV and GVN has been spelled out in any detail, we believe the principal factors affecting any meaningful rapprochement would be the following:
 - a. *Ngo Dinh Nhu*. Nhu is a brilliant, shrewd and ambitious man, with a consummate interest in maintaining his political power and all the accoutrements necessary to its exercise. He has a deep antipathy toward the Hanoi regime, reinforced by the fact that the Viet Minh Probably tortured and killed his oldest brother. Nevertheless, it would be quite in character for Nhu—and Diem—to seek some measure of maneuverability vis-a-vis the US to avoid being boxed between two unacceptable alternatives: abject surrender to US demands or a loss of all political power. It is within this context that the likelihood of Ngo family dealings with North Vietnam should be assessed. We believe that if Nhu and Diem feel themselves soon to be faced with such extreme alternatives, they might well be moved to cast about for some sort of agreement with Hanoi. Diem would be less likely to accept an arrangement with Hanoi than his brother, but circumstances are now more propitious than before for Nhu to argue this course. Nhu's acute appreciation of Communist tactics and untrustworthiness would probably set limits to the nature of any agreements with the DRV to which he would be a willing party. Nhu would not be likely to consider unification an acceptable alternative. However, if the Ngo's were moved to seek a rapprochement with the DRV on terms less drastic than reunification—e.g., a cease-fire—they might seriously entertain the almost certain minimum DRV demand for the removal of US forces.
 - b. *The DRV*. Although recent progress made by South Vietnam in waging the war against the Viet Cong has caused Hanoi to extend its timetable, no available evidence indicates that the Communists

are anything but confident of ultimate victory. Thus, Hanoi is not yet in a position where it feels any pressure to seek a rapprochement with the GVN on any but its own terms. So far as reunification is concerned, the DRV's minimum conditions—as frequently spelled out by Ho—include the termination and withdrawal of all US military support from South Vietnam and the establishment of a national coalition government within South Vietnam to include all political groups, including the Viet Cong. The coalition, in turn, would negotiate with Hanoi on terms of reunification for all Vietnam. These conditions would be patently unacceptable to Diem and Nhu. However, Hanoi might be willing to consider something less than reunification, particularly if it thought that its aims could thereby be achieved more quickly and cheaply than by continuing a campaign of armed insurgency. Hanoi's conditions for such a more modest rapprochement might be considerably less stringent.

- c. *The French.* Despite present stresses in Franco-US relations, it is unlikely that France would offer to replace US assistance to the GVN (even if the French felt able to make such an offer, which they probably do not). In fact, France is not likely to make any aid offer sufficiently substantial and concrete for Nhu to feel sanguine about casting the US aside and turning toward negotiations with the DRV under an umbrella of French support. On the other hand, France would certainly not discourage—and may well be actively abetting—overtures from Saigon or Hanoi exploring the possibilities of a rapprochement and a neutralization of South Vietnam. At least some key French officials probably feel that Hanoi is almost certain to dominate the Indochinese peninsula eventually since the army and political organization which vanquished France is not going to be defeated by the South Vietnamese, even with US assistance. To persons of such persuasion, it probably appears that France's long-term interests lie in seeking a posture which wins Hanoi's friendship and may one day enable France to serve as Hanoi's bridge to the West. One indication of the existence of such sentiments is the degree of French support enjoyed by Tran Van Huu—a former French puppet premier under Bao Dai who now resides in Paris and actively advocates a neutralist solution for South Vietnam. French attitudes toward Vietnam are colored by a desire to regain as much influence as possible in Indochina, reinforced by a dislike at seeing US predominance in South Vietnam and Laos. Officials holding such views are likely to receive a sympathetic hearing from De Gaulle, for there is little in such lines of argument that he would not find appealing.

- d. *Attitudes within South Vietnam*. Even if Nhu himself were inclined in this direction, he would find “selling” a deal with Hanoi to key elements of the Vietnamese population a delicate and difficult problem. The difficulties, in fact, would appear virtually insurmountable at the present time. Nhu could not reasonably expect to effect any real rapprochement with the North without signaling his intent to the ARVN generals-and the US intelligence community. During recent weeks, ARVN generals have indicated that any approach to the North on Nhu's part would provide them with the necessary excuse to “save South Vietnam” by mounting a coup. Nhu's adroitness and skill in political manipulation cannot be ignored, however, and if he were genuinely anxious to pursue such a tack, he might believe, rightly or wrongly, that he could outmaneuver even his military opponents particularly if he had some commitment of French assistance.
4. Caveat. The preceding argument is based on the assumption that Diem and Nhu, although operating under tremendous pressures, remain essentially rational. Some observers, including Alsop, feel that both Ngo brothers may no longer be rational. Should this be the case, the likelihood of Nhu's endeavoring to seek an accommodation with Hanoi must be assessed considerably higher than indicated above, for Nhu's essential judgments of his own capabilities, his country's interests, and the degree of the Communist threat would no longer be balanced or realistic. To a somewhat less extent the same would also have to be said of Diem-though he would be more likely to withdraw totally from the world (e.g., into a monastery) and leave all political decisions to his brother.

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 306, USIA/TOP Files: FRC 67 A 222, IAF-1963. Secret. Prepared in the CIA and transmitted to the Director of USIA by Ray S. Cline, Deputy Director (Intelligence).

² Entitled “Very Ugly Stuff.”

³ No copy of the March 1962 interview with Ho Chi Minh has been found. The reference to the “more recent one” is to the Burchett interview with Ho Chi Minh in May 1963; see [footnote 3, Document 44](#).

152. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 27, 1963, noon.

602. Reference: Department telegram 478.²

1. No disagreement with your analysis in general terms. In my para 2 Embtel 555,³ I was thinking of poor people in towns and cities who may get caught up in inflationary spiral following in the wake of aid cut-off. Agree food, clothing and shelter represent bulk their expenditures, but aid imports not unrelated these items. In direct sense, milk and cotton financed in past by us. We also finance such things as medicines, raw material for many other products consumed by such people. It is our estimate that if shortages and price increases occur for various commodities this may have radiation effect on other commodities having no relation to shortage imported commodities. This, in short, was intent my message.
2. Agree that government will try insure stability rice prices and present GVN stock position such that effective demand can be readily satisfied. Your questions on free distribution surplus foods difficult to answer. CRS unable cope with present program for lack qualified administrative personnel; no analogous Buddhist organization in existence. Further, there are considerable stocks flour in Saigon warehouses under CRS program which could be quickly put to use, if necessary. Our guess that in such eventuality GVN would insist on getting into act.
3. My staff is continuously assessing economic and price indicators and so far see no reason for altering our present posture "maximum administrative delay".

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, AID (US) S VIET. Top Secret; Priority; Eyes Only. Received at 1:36 a.m. and passed to the White House and to Rusk at USUN.

² Document 148.

³ Document 137.

153. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 27, 1963, 6 p.m.

605. Pass to USIA for Murrow.

1. I propose that immediate study be made to ascertain the feasibility of VOA broadcasting a series of utterances in Vietnamese to South Viet-Nam at regular intervals, said utterances being well edited and well presented statements of basic American ideals such as free speech, free press, habeas corpus, due process, dignity of the individual, pursuit of happiness, all men created equal, government is the servant of the people, etc. At present virtually all these principles are being flagrantly violated in Viet-Nam. In fact, I have just received well authenticated report of the police knocking on doors in the middle of the night and taking the women in the family off to jail for interrogation.
2. Purpose of this proposal should be to arouse Vietnamese people to a point which would worry Diem and Nhu to the point where they would complain to me and thus provide leverage to U.S. foreign policy objectives.
3. My belief that this might be effective is based on Diem's complaint to me against Armed Forces Radio broadcasts here which mentioned free speech, and no arrest without trial. This material came from the American Heritage series and was used to fill the space which had been used by the commercial when the main program had been broadcast in the U.S. AFRS was told "palace was upset". If such things disturb Diem and are regarded by him as a threat to his power structure, they might give us leverage with him.
4. Surely it is much better for U.S. influence to be asserted through the force of our ideals rather than through our money or our power plays, necessary though these sometimes are. The Viet Cong, for example, do a good deal with very mediocre equipment and this is due at least in part to the appeal of their ideals, although terrorism also plays a large role.
5. It might just be that in the present tense time this would cause more anxiety than withholding of commercial import funds is doing.
6. Would it not be a splendid thing for our world-wide reputation for us to get hard things done in Viet-Nam through the power of American ideas?

7. All of the above is based on my belief that VOA has large audience in Viet-Nam.
8. Mecklin concurs.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, INF 8 US. Top Secret.
Received at 2:53 p.m. A handwritten note on the source text indicates it was passed to the White House.

154. Report by the Secretary of Defense (McNamara)¹

Saigon, undated.

REPORT OF McNAMARA'S 27 SEPTEMBER 63 INTERVIEW WITH RICHARDSON

During a long interview, lasting two hours, Richardson stated (in his words and sequence of thought):

1. The Buddhist crisis crystallized the discontent which had been lying dormant for some time.
2. The future is so uncertain he cannot predict what will happen.
3. The massive arrests of the students has been very bad.
4. The arrests include the arrest of children of the military officers and high-ranking bureaucrats.
5. The night arrests are particularly bad for they cause the people to hate you.
6. R² told Diem that for each cabinet member it is a personal crisis.
7. What he particularly deplores is the climate of suspicion.
8. Diem is still respected but they can't swallow his family.
9. R particularly fears action by the highest level of the armed forces.
10. Twice within the last few days R turned down proposals that he be Secretary General of the Council; Diem said this makes you Prime Minister but R said he can't accept such a post in this Administration.
11. R has been told he is under surveillance—the family looks on him as an American.
12. He does not see anyone with enough moral authority to replace Diem but the course Diem and his family are following will lead to disaster.
13. Diem is devoted to his country but wed to his family.
14. The relationships between the US military advisors and their counterparts are good, but if the atmosphere of suspicion does not evaporate, the lower levels of the Vietnamese will withdraw from that relationship—"I see the process".
15. Diem is respected; he has a lot of moral qualities, but people are damaging his reputation and that will ruin him. It is a tragedy.
16. "I ask you Mr. Secretary to be very firm; it is the only way. Don't cut off aid; suspend the aid."
17. Diem is anxious about the delay in commercial aid.
18. After talking to high-ranking officials in the SVN armed forces, R has nightmares. But men are capable of doing very stupid things.

19. Four generals have asked to be in the cabinet. They are very dangerous.
20. To save his country we must put pressure on Diem to force him to stop the repressive measures and force Nhu to leave. Otherwise a coup will occur and this will be disastrous.
21. Nhu was the instigator of the attack against the pagodas.
22. Don't believe what you see on the surface; the people are angry.
23. The episode of the students is absolutely horrible.
24. In the bottom of their hearts many officers have been fumed against the government.
25. The Navy Commander who saved Diem's life in 1960 can't even convince his own father of the merit of the government.
26. People hate Madame Nhu and her brother. If Nhu tried to succeed his brother, there will be war.
27. Not only have there been night arrests, but kidnappings by the Surete.
28. The night arrests are terrible; mothers try to delay the taking of their daughters until dawn. It is horrible—like Kadar in Hungary.
29. You asked me "How many people were arrested; how many released?" "I don't know."
30. The managing editor of Trudo, a paper suspected of being pro-American has now been jailed.
31. The feeling of many of the cabinet members is that they are fed up. They want to resign. But if they do, they are lost. Many cannot afford to leave the country and those who don't will be put in jail. There were 36 secret agents in Mau's house when he was going to leave.
32. R told Diem: you can't survive without American aid. The plaster will go, then the dong—the rate is already dropping.
33. Khiem, the brother of Madame Nhu and head of the secret police, is a mad man and obsessed with sex. R is on his assassination list.
34. The Minister of Economics, a devout Catholic, told R he could not sleep last night thinking of Nhu's statements which were so anti-American. He believed no one could benefit other than the Communists and this led him to conclude there must be a Communist behind him.

Robert S. McNamara³

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, Back Up Documents and Notes 9/25/63-Trip to SVN. Secret.

² “R” is a code name for Nguyen Dinh Thuan, Vietnamese Secretary of State at the Presidency and Assistant Secretary of State for National Defense.

³ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

155. Editorial Note

Under new election laws adopted by the National Assembly on June 13, 1963, and promulgated by President Diem on June 16, elections for the Republic of Vietnam's National Assembly were to take place on August 31. The laws called for a 2-week active campaign beginning on August 16 and culminating on election day. The events of August 21 and the imposition of martial law delayed this schedule, and elections were ultimately held on September 27. On October 7, the Embassy submitted to the Department in airgram 249 a report on the campaign and the elections. The following comprises the summary portion of that report:

"Preceding election day on September 27, potential candidates had been effectively limited by a variety of factors ranging from a general sense of the hazards of independent politics to quite specific indications that their particular candidacies were unwelcome. One candidate with a reputation for independent views, Nguyen Tran, was disqualified. Thus on September 27 the alternatives before the voters were limited; there was no known oppositionist in the running. This fact suggested that any candidate still in contention would be more or less acceptable to the government, or at least not seriously opposed thereby, and this consideration was probably a major factor in the government's decision to proceed with the elections at this time. The advantages in so proceeding depended on the government's ability (a) to produce a large voter turnout, thus refuting the idea of popular discontent which might manifest itself in abstentions from the polls, (b) to maintain tight public security against the threat of VC disruptive activity or popular manifestations, and (c) to administer the voting in a manner that appeared both fair and efficient, so as to enhance the government's prestige both among its own people and internationally. In general, the government appeared to have succeeded on these points, although some doubt is cast on point (c) by the existence of charges of various malpractices such as the issuance of more than one voting card to 'reliable' individuals and of manipulated vote-counting. If such practices in fact took place, the Embassy doubts that they were designed to swing elections to particular individuals (the GVN did have a list of favorites, and did work for them), although this may have been the incidental result. It seems more likely that such practices were designed to insure the appearance of a large

voter turnout which was a factor of more concern to the government. It is of course also possible that corruption or misplaced zeal at the local level may have influenced some results.

“In general, the GVN ability to mount successfully an effort such as that represented by the election in the present state of popular feeling represents impressive evidence of the GVN's ability to control its own people (not, however, of its popularity), to carry out a complex and widespread organizational project, and to maintain a surprisingly high degree of security against potential VC disruptive efforts. Not to be entirely ignored either, is the long-run benefit resulting from the training of both government and people in the basic mechanics of electoral procedures.

“With regard to the victorious candidates for the 123 seats, these included 60 incumbents (25 incumbents were beaten). 96 candidates who were supported by the GVN (according to a CAS report) won election. These included 55 members of the National Revolutionary Movement (NRM) and 19 women, all of whom are probably members of the Women's Solidarity Movement (WSM). On the other hand, based on the same CAS report, GVN-supported candidates were defeated in 15 cases (the GVN remaining neutral in the rest of the elections). It is not clear that all these 15 defeats will be allowed to stand, since some challenges to the elections held in Saigon have already been registered, and it remains possible that various devices might be used to overturn the results already recorded. Nevertheless, the GVN is likely to acquiesce in most (if not all) of these defeats.

“The new legislature will have an almost even balance between new deputies and incumbents, and among the new faces will be two deputies of Chinese-origin, representing the first emergence of the Cholon Chinese community into Vietnamese public life. Missing from the new Assembly will be such relatively independent figures, who tended to be identified with organized labor, as Pham Van Tung and Tran Sanh Buu. These men were, interestingly enough, beaten by the two Chinese-origin deputies. As has been indicated, the extent to which candidates were screened as well as the large percentage of government-backed candidates who won, combine to suggest that the most conspicuous characteristic of the new Assembly will be its docility. Given the already established powerlessness of the National

Assembly as an institution, the new personnel do not appear likely to cast themselves in the role of innovators. Any significant evolution in the function of the Assembly during the next few years will therefore probably have to depend on initiatives taken outside the legislature itself." (Department of State, Central Files, POL 14 S VIET)

The elections took place with only minor and isolated incidents of violence notwithstanding earlier reports, mostly based on Government of Vietnam sources, that the Viet Cong sought to sabotage the voting procedures on a countrywide basis. As the Embassy observed elsewhere in airgram A-249, the lack of violence "provided a remarkable example either of VC indifference to the idea of disrupting the elections or of GVN ability to provide a high degree of security at least for a short time over its national territory." The Embassy also noted that the elections represented a "calculated risk" to the Diem government in that they gave voters the option of leaving their ballots blank as a sign of disapproval, and polling stations provided a potential focus for popular demonstrations against the government. On the other hand, the Embassy noted, the Diem government stood to gain in domestic and international prestige if it could carry off the elections successfully. While the Embassy was unprepared to accept the stated 92.82 percent voter participation at face value, it did believe there was a massive voter turnout, in part because of subtle official pressure and in part because of the holiday atmosphere which the Diem government attempted to associate with the elections.

156. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 27, 1963, 9 p.m.

608. Deptel 447.² Following comments on possible means of exerting pressure on GVN without interfering seriously with war effort were prepared by USOM Director Brent. Analysis strikes me as sound and I hope will be helpful in Washington consideration of problem:

1. We must recognize that the management of the aid program cannot alone achieve major political changes or reversals in direction. Properly timed announcements and actions on aid matters can be used to reinforce and make effective other strategic moves.
2. In Viet-Nam the problem is complicated by the security situation and the US strategic interest. We must face the fact that we cannot hold SVN without the Vietnamese; they can hold for a considerable length of time without us. It is politically intolerable to postulate the possibility of our assuming the position the French were in during the period 1947-1954.
3. Since the GVN is as aware of these facts as we, it is not reasonable to assume sudden success of any moves we might make which rely either solely or largely on the aid program.
4. Items 1 through 4 of Deptel 447 are largely "psychological" rather than "real" in their impact. The GVN could compensate for any of these actions through diversions of materials and funds or through other measures. Recognizing these limitations, we believe they can exert great pressure on the GVN if appropriately publicized in each case as symbols of US determination to disassociate ourselves from the Palace Guard. Properly handled, they can undermine the "political credit rating" of Nhu (and by inference Diem) and at the same time improve the US image in Asia and elsewhere and assuage US public opinion which Washington feels important at this time.
5. The careful timing of each move is important. The tactical moves cannot be trotted out at any time with equal effect. Each move should follow immediately on the heels of a new provocation on the part of the GVN to show a cause and effect relationship. These provocations may be directed either against the US (occurring almost daily in "The Times of Viet-Nam" and in Mme. Nhu's tirades abroad) or against the Vietnamese populace.

6. The individual tactical moves must be part of a larger plan having the purpose of changing the composition or the policies of the present government. We assume that we are concluding that the war cannot be won on a permanent basis with the present government; that covert negotiation with the military will proceed concurrently with other US actions to effect a change in government, and that the management of the aid is designed to reinforce such other attempts to change the government. If this assumption is incorrect, the moves outlined in paragraphs 1-4 of Deptel 447 hold little promise for achieving our objectives.
7. Publicity or exploitation of tactical moves in the aid program may vary from use of VOA, leaking to the press by the Ambassador or merely passing out to key GVN officials.
8. With respect to the individual suggestions:
 - (a) GVN written guarantees—This action should only be taken on programs we are prepared and willing to terminate. The GVN would in all likelihood refuse such guarantees as an affront implying past or proposed “repressions” on their part. Then we would proceed to suspend the aid project we had selected for such treatment and appropriate publicity would put the GVN in the position of having refused to give guarantees against repression. We could select, for such treatment, items in the police program to lend additional credibility to our position.
 - (b) Combat police and DGI—Though the discrimination between elements of the programs being used against the Viet Cong and those not so engaged will be difficult given the war footing of the nation as a whole, we nevertheless feel there is considerable opportunity for psychological impact in this area.
 - (c) Hamlet militia leaders—Concur with idea that US withdraw support and suggest that word be passed along to GVN military that US not prepared support personal political vehicles of Nhu.
 - (d) DOD psywar—We suggest that [garble] withhold funds for this item in their joint support budget and then tell General Oai that we are doing this because of the close tie-in of his activities with the personal fortunes of Counsellor Nhu. Hopefully this will have the effect of making the psywar effort more independent of Nhu's direction since the operation itself is one we would prefer to continue to support.
9. Item 8 of Deptel 447 suggests the accumulation of substantial plaster resources for use by the US directly in the provinces. There is now on deposit in the Bank of Viet-Nam about \$2-3 million worth of plasters belonging to the US Government as repayments on prior years Mutual Security Program loans. We could gradually withdraw those funds

and hold in escrow as cash for unilateral operations during a short period of administrative foul-up in the wake of a coup or coup attempt. We do not recommend dollar purchases, especially large-scale purchases, because (1) it would frustrate our cut-back on commercial imports by yielding the GVN foreign exchange for expenditures anywhere, and (2) it would put us immediately under suspicion of contemplating a takeover operation. If we should ever get ourselves in the unfortunate position of fighting a war on the side of rebellious Generals while the Ngo family still retains power in Saigon, we could pump in dollars or military scrip and make that acceptable currency in the regions we control.

10. Regarding questions on the commercial import program, reserves are at about \$150-160 million and annual earnings of foreign exchange are about \$60-70 million. This would provide sufficient exchange for almost 12 months of commercial imports at the present level of licensing (excluding major investment projects and military hardware). We are assuming that the GVN would draw down reserves for a period of time rather than permit serious shortages to occur and prices to rise, in order to frustrate the US efforts to force the government to capitulate to our demands for reform.

After some months of aid cut-offs we could expect importers and government bureaucrats to become worried that reserves will be exhausted and hoarding, speculation, and major price increases to set in. This would be the period of major psychological impact on the government and it is our estimate they would be more inclined to talk than they are now.

If we were to elect to be more selective in the management of the commercial import program we could renew financing the kinds of goods necessary for the day-to-day well-being of the people (fertilizer, milk, cotton, medicines, etc.) adding up to perhaps \$40 million on an annual rate and deleting from our program such things as steel, cement, machinery, etc., that are essential for the economy as a whole but do not directly affect people going to the market place. This approach would have the advantage of permitting us to identify ourselves and our program with the masses of people. It would have the disadvantage of permitting the GVN to hold out longer since their reserves would not be drawn down as rapidly. On balance, the latter course appears preferable.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, AID (US) S VIET. Top Secret; Priority; Eyes Only. Received at 10:18 a.m. and passed to the White House at 12:48 p.m. and to Rusk at USUN at 1 p.m.

² Document 140.

157. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, September 28, 1963—1:30 p.m.

496. Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge. Believe it might be helpful to you to have preliminary Department thinking on possible Vietnamese Government structure and composition under various hypotheses. Hypotheses examined consist of (a) revamped and broadened Diem Government with or without Nhu playing some role, (b) successor government headed by Tho and (c) government under preponderantly military leadership. Seems clear from our studies that Viet-Nam has no lack of qualified leadership or executive talent if available personnel resources are put to effective use.

Principles. We believe it desirable assure adequate regional representation in government under all three hypotheses. Southern areas have strongly tended to feel that Diem Government has discriminated against their area in favor of persons from northern and central VietNam. Southern areas are crucial to country and to winning of war and should be properly represented in government.

We also believe effort should be made to establish as broad a government as is feasible in an effort to unify political circles, educated class and people in war against Viet Cong. However if attempted too broadly result might be introduction into government of disparate and incompatible personalities who might hinder effective prosecution of government affairs.

We therefore think it might be useful establish, at least for duration of hostilities, a Political Consultative Council to which certain leading figures might be nominated in order avoid political and personality clashes in executive branch. Proposals for nominations to this body could be made by any member of Cabinet but should be approved by majority or two-thirds vote of Cabinet.

Council's role should be clearly advisory only. Its views and recommendations should be considered by Cabinet but decisions should rest with Cabinet. But to give this organ sufficient substance to make

membership attractive, it should be consulted by government on all major issues.

Such body would appear particularly desirable in view supine status National Assembly which will not be improved by current elections. We also believe this device could be useful in giving Viet-Nam's educated elite an institutional channel for political expression which they have been denied to date by Ngo family.

Personalities. Effective broadening of Diem Government would have to be based on assumption (which we realize is questionable) that Diem (and Nhu if he remained on scene) would be willing change approach to politics and method of governing to permit real sharing of authority. Otherwise we recognize that either new figures would not participate or changes in Cabinet would represent only facade changes as they have been in past.

In revamped Diem Government we would propose Vice President Tho be given considerable coordinating authority over Cabinet in fact (perhaps in new post of Prime Minister) and not just in name as he now has. Thuan could be retained as SecState for Presidency, but relieved of his Assistant Defense portfolio as these two positions are too burdensome for one man however able to carry. We suggest team of General Big Minh as SecState for National Defense and General Kim as Deputy who could conduct Magsaysay-type operation in Viet-Nam through coordination of military and strategic hamlet programs. General Don (next ranking general after Minh) could become Chief Joint General Staff. Interior might also be headed by General (Khiem, Khanh or Chieu) who would work closely with Minh and Kim.

Other Cabinet posts could be filled from following list of able personalities: [*less than 1 line not declassified*], Vu Van Thai, Nguyen Huu Chau, Vu Quoc Thuc, Vo Van Hai, [*less than 1 line not declassified*], Nguyen Thanh Lap, Tran Quoc Buu, Tran Dinh De (incumbent), Tran Ngoc Lien, Tran Le Quang (incumbent), [*less than 1 line not declassified*], Bui Van Thinh, Nguyen Quoc Dinh, Tran Van Chnong, Tran Van Lam, [*less than 1 line not declassified*].

Under second hypothesis of successor government headed by Tho, government could be largely same as that outlined above for revamped Diem government. However, seems unlikely that Tho would want to retain Thuan in government since Thuan during days when he was Diem favorite made little secret of his low regard for Tho.

Under third hypothesis preponderantly military government would likely consist of generals named above, with Big Minh as head because of popularity within armed forces and acceptability to other generals. Generals could be expected occupy certain key posts in government, but other ministries could probably be filled from above civilian list.

Political Consultative Council under any of three hypotheses could include well-known political oppositionists like Pham Huy Quat, Phan Quang Dan, Pham Khac Suu, Nguyen Ton Hoan, [*less than 1 line not declassified*], Hoang Co Thuy (most of whom are now in prison or exile). Tri Quang and [*less than 1 line not declassified*] as leading Buddhist and Catholic figures, respectively, could be named to Council. Lt. Col. Pham Ngoc Thao might also be nominated to Council since his inclusion in government would probably not be acceptable to generals. Professional people [*1 line not declassified*] could likewise be chosen, together with business representatives like [*less than 1 line not declassified*], Nguyen Van Buu.

Would appreciate any comments you may have on subject this message.

Ball

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret; Priority. Drafted by Mendenhall; cleared with McGeorge Bundy, Ball, and Harriman; and approved by Hilsman.

158. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Saigon, September 29, 1963, 2:30-5:30 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

Ngo Dinh Diem, President of the Republic of Viet-Nam
Nguyen Dinh Thuan, Secretary of State for the Presidency and Assistant Secretary of State
for National Defense
Henry Cabot Lodge, Ambassador
Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense
General Maxwell D. Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
General Paul D. Harkins, Commander, Military Assistance Command, Viet-Nam
Frederick W. Flott, First Secretary of Embassy (interpreting)

SUMMARY

During the first two hours of the meeting, President Diem held forth on the course of the war, the key role played by the strategic hamlets program, and on the wisdom of the various major decisions of his government. During the third hour, Secretary McNamara explained, briefly but deliberately and with considerable force, the concern of the U.S. Government at the recent political unrest in Viet-Nam. He noted that this unrest and the repression that had brought it on could endanger the war effort and the American support for that effort. Secretary McNamara brought up the unfortunate public declarations of Mme. Ngo Dinh Nhu.

After Diem had made the inevitable rebuttals and explanations, General Taylor stressed the vital importance of responding to the very legitimate anxiety felt in the U.S. Diem cannot have missed the point that Secretary McNamara's remarks were a carefully thought-out and deliberately expressed statement of U.S. disapproval and concern, and that this disapproval and concern was felt just as strongly by the Department of Defense as by the Department of State.

THE MONOLOGUE

During the first two hours of the meeting, Diem did almost all the talking, often using a number of maps in a rambling discussion of the war and the wisdom of various policies and courses of action adopted by his government. During this virtual monologue, he made the following principal points, all of which he had touched on in greater or lesser detail at earlier meetings with the Ambassador:

Strategic Hamlets

The war was going well, thanks in large measure to the strategic hamlets program. Due to that program, the Viet Cong enemy was having increasing difficulties in finding food and recruits, and was being steadily forced into increasingly difficult and unrewarding tactical situations. Diem said that American deliveries under Public Law 480, particularly in the category of feed grains, had been most helpful to the success of the strategic hamlet program. (He made no other direct acknowledgment of American aid.) He said that the British had given the Vietnamese government valuable advice at the outset of the program, based on British experience in Malaya. He said that for a variety of local reasons, his government had not followed the British advice in all instances.

He recalled that the British had advised him to consolidate and hold firmly one area before extending the strategic hamlets program to another. They had also advised him to hold the arterial coastal highway and consolidate the area between it and the seacoast before trying to secure areas further inland. He noted that the British had said that the strategic hamlets program should be limited at first to the most populous and most productive areas of the country. He remarked in this connection that he had made important departures from the British plan, but always for good and valid reasons.

Outlining his thoughts on maps, he explained that if he had disregarded, even for a short time, the under-populated and comparatively unproductive highlands, these areas would have become a base for Viet Cong attacks and for a Viet Cong drive to the sea to cut the highway and split the Republic.

He acknowledged that his strategic hamlets program was overextended and that in some areas the Viet Cong could attack and overwhelm poorly garrisoned strategic hamlets. He said that he realized some strategic hamlets were set up before the defense personnel were properly trained or armed, but that on balance both the risks and the losses were acceptable. For example, he said, he could push ahead rapidly with the establishment of ten substandard strategic hamlets. The Viet Cong could attack these and overwhelm, say, two of them. But if two fell, eight others would survive and grow stronger, and the area in which the Viet Cong could operate with impunity would shrink faster than otherwise would have been the case.

Another reason he gave for making departures from the British plan was that by so doing he could put isolated strategic hamlets into key crossroads and junction points, and force on the Viet Cong considerable detours in their supply routes. Further to the question of departures from the British operational plan, he said he had taken the calculated risk of opening highways to traffic before the areas through which they passed were absolutely secure. He said that, on the whole, he was satisfied with this gamble, and that thanks to his willingness to make departures from the plan and accept risks, the war effort was further along.

The strategic hamlets, then, affected all aspects of the war: the military, sociological, economic, and political. When Viet Cong cadres who had escaped to the north a few years ago returned to the south, they were amazed at the economic and sociological progress that had been made. This impression of real progress in South Viet-Nam increased their propensity to defect (see below under Defections). Thanks to the strategic hamlets program there is a growing grass-roots democracy. While the country's institutions are not yet perfect, they have been strengthened by the strategic hamlets program; in two or three more years Viet-Nam will be a model democracy.

Cadres

The matter of cadres was the key to the solution of all the country's problems. It must be remembered that Viet-Nam is an underdeveloped country that is still suffering from a serious lack of trained personnel. At the time of Independence, there were, say, five judges in the whole country. There should be at least one per province. Much has been accomplished. At present about half of the provinces have one judge, and of the other half, sometimes two or even three, share, one judge. It is hard to apply to the letter the right of habeas corpus and other refinements of a legal system inherited from the French in these circumstances.

But progress is being made. Cadres are brought in from the provinces to a training camp fifteen kilometers outside of Saigon. They are taught to draw on locally available resources, and experience gained in one area is passed on to cadres from another area. On Fridays there are political discussions. Members of parliament and high officials visit the camps and stimulate discussion groups. When the training cycle is completed, the cadres return to their strategic hamlets and set up comparable discussion groups there. Democracy and its institutions are strengthened. (Later on in the meeting, Diem returned to the subject of lack of cadres when

attempting to explain away the recent political unrest and Buddhist and student demonstrations.)

Creation of New Provinces

Diem traced out on the map the new provinces he had created or intended to create. He seemed to see in the creation of new provinces a way of bringing a greater effort to bear on solving the problems of an area.

For example, he is creating a new province west of Saigon to sit astride the Viet Cong communications route running from Tay-Ninh Province southeasterly to the Delta. This will impede access from the Viet Cong stronghold on the Cambodian border northwest of Saigon to the Delta. Diem claimed that the Viet Cong commander for that stronghold lived in air-conditioned comfort in Phnom Penh and frequently drove to the Vietnamese border from the Cambodian capital in an American automobile.

Elections

He noted that the elections held a few days before had been a great success. Many more people voted than ever before, thanks in part to the fact that there were about 50% more ballot boxes than at the last elections. Communist efforts to disrupt the voting had been a failure, partly as a result of several successful security operations in which "all three security services" participated.

Again, the vast extension of the strategic hamlets program made it easier and safer for people to vote than in past years, and he was touched at the interest of even the simplest peasants in exercising their suffrage and participating in the democratic process. In spite of the improved security situation, at least two people were killed by the Viet Cong because they voted, and he felt this loss deeply and personally. The discussion groups in the strategic hamlets had further increased the people's interest in government and voting. (*Ambassador's comment:* This contrasts with well-founded observation that truckloads of soldiers were carted around in trucks so that they could vote several times in one day.)

Crop Destruction and Defoliation

In response to his rhetorical question, he said that the crop destruction and defoliation programs were useful and were necessary for a speedy

conclusion of the war. He noted that the British experience in Malaya left no doubt as to their importance. "If you want to add years to the length of this war," he said, "simply cut off these programs." He explained that in some parts of the country, the Viet Cong were using half of their troops to grow food, and that except for the Delta area, where food is so plentiful that controls are almost impossible, the Viet Cong was very hard pressed for food, all the more so because it was increasingly difficult for them to get into villages or to force farmers to give them food.

He said flatly that regardless of whatever confusion might reign on the subject in Washington, crop destruction and defoliation were not humanitarian questions but were simple tools of victory. His field commanders, he said, felt particularly strongly about this. Some had complained that they had food patch targets in mind which, if they could not be attacked by the end of October, would produce a crop that would sustain the enemy for months.

Larger Viet Cong Units

Diem noted that while the total number of Viet Cong had declined in the past year, the number of relatively large units—companies and battalions—engaged had risen. He explained that this was because of the success of the strategic hamlets program. In the past, the Viet Cong could get what they wanted from a village—food and recruits—with a mere handful of men. Now they were increasingly forced to mount a company-scale attack to get into the village. Furthermore, since the whole rural environment had become much more actively hostile to the Viet Cong, they were forced to group up in larger units to survive. These larger units, of course, offered better targets to the government's forces. The fact that there was a greater use of large units by the Viet Cong was one more indication of how well the war was going for the government. It was one more indication that the Viet Cong found themselves more and more in the position of being like a foreign expeditionary corps, rather than as a force that could exist and move in the population like a fish in the sea.

Public Works and Opening Roads

Diem attached great importance to his public works program and the strategic concepts served by it. He showed on the maps where he had put through roads and canals, or had improved existing ones, and noted the many economic, social, political and military advantages that resulted

from this effort. He remarked that in many parts of the country food deliveries by road were almost normal, as in pre-war times. This development relieved the navy of the job of convoying sea-borne supplies, and left it free to pursue the enemy more aggressively.

As if to answer the constant American representations in favor of a more mobile and aggressive employment of his forces, Diem remarked that it was sometimes necessary to commit troops to static defenses, as around key public utilities, factories, and bridges. Other forces had to be committed more or less statically to reinforce strategic hamlets that were in particularly exposed areas or had not yet generated their own trained defensive forces.

During a discussion of public works and their influence on the economic well-being of various provinces, General Harkins turned the conversation to the Seventh Division area southwest of Saigon, remarked that Kien Phong Province was very well run and that the province chief, Lt. Col. Dinh Van Phat, was very able indeed. President Diem acknowledged this. General Harkins went on to make the point that the situation in the adjoining province, Kien Tuong, was bad, and that the province chief, Major Le Thanh Nhut, was not doing his job and should be replaced. Diem objected to this, and tried to explain away in terms of the local economic geography, the difficulties of the lagging province. General Harkins made it clear that with all due respect to the President's explanation, he continued to have his doubts about the leader of the lagging province.

Viet Cong Defections

Diem ended his optimistic monologue by saying that there had been a significant increase in the rate of defections from the Viet Cong. As noted earlier, many cadres who had left the south a few years ago were impressed with the social progress and improved standard of living in the south and contrasted these with the depressed condition in the north. This was especially true of those who had some education and could make comparisons. So many Viet Cong were trying to defect that senior unit commanders and hard-core Communists were being forced to take this new desire to defect into account in planning operations. Commanders had become loathe to send their men out individually or in small groups. This was another of the forces that compelled the Viet Cong to establish larger units.

Knowing that their commanders would be unlikely to trust them on an individual or small-scale mission that would give them an opportunity to defect, many individual Viet Cong would try to distinguish themselves in a number of encounters so that they would be entrusted with a mission which would offer them an opportunity to surrender. The earlier land reform program of Diem's government, which had won the government so much popular support, was generally known to the Viet Cong, and awareness of this land reform was often a factor in an individual's decision to come over to the government side. (Ambassador's comment: See Vice President Tho's remarks on Viet Cong defections in Embtel sent SecState 613, September 30, 1963.)²

Diem concluded his optimistic presentation by noting that although the war was going well, much remained to be done in the Delta area, which presented many special problems. The battle-hardened 9th Division was recently transferred to that area from the north, and it would soon make its presence felt. He noted that it was hard to wage war in an area that consisted mainly either of muddy rice paddies or of the thick and almost impenetrable foliage of coconut plantations. General Harkins remarked at this point that the war in coconut plantations would be greatly facilitated if Diem would lift his prohibition on the use of 500-pound bombs (forbidden after the disturbingly accurate bombing of the palace by rebels in the Vietnamese air force in February, 1962). Diem seemed to be in some doubt as to whether the General had made his statement in earnest or was simply "needling" him. He replied half-jokingly that if there should be a real need for the use of 500-pound bombs and if the war could be won that way, he would give the necessary clearance. (Although the conversation was in French, he used the English word "clearance", and on other occasions used a number of other American military expressions.)

THE AMERICAN REPRESENTATIONS

When a suitable pause occurred in the monologue, Secretary McNamara began his statement. He said that he was in Viet-Nam because it was the sincere desire of the United States to help Viet-Nam win the war against the Viet Cong. He emphasized that this was basically a Vietnamese war and that all the United States could do was to help. The Secretary noted that while the progress of the war was reasonably satisfactory, he was concerned over a number of things. There was the political unrest in Saigon, and the evident inability of the government to provide itself with a broad political base. There was the disturbing probability that the war effort would be damaged by the government's political deficiencies and

the attendant loss of popularity. The recent wave of repressions had alarmed public opinion both in Viet-Nam and in the United States.

Diem ascribed all this to inexperience and demagoguery within Viet-Nam and to misunderstanding in the United States of the real position in Viet-Nam because of the vicious attacks of the American press on his government, his family and himself. He said nothing to indicate that he accepted the thesis that there was a real problem, and his whole manner was one of rejecting outright the Secretary's representations.

The Secretary resumed by saying that he knew what it was to be attacked by the press, but that, regardless of what one thought of the accuracy of the press—and he was willing to acknowledge that some press accounts may have been in error—there was no escaping the fact that there was a serious political crisis, a crisis of confidence in the government of Viet-Nam both in Viet-Nam and in the United States. This was demonstrated by such tangible evidence as the resignation of the Foreign Minister, the recall or resignation of Ambassador Tran Van Chuong at Washington, and the fact that Saigon University was closed. The Secretary warned Diem that public opinion in the United States seriously questioned the wisdom or necessity of the United States Government's aiding a government that was so unpopular at home and that seemed increasingly unlikely to forge the kind of national unity or purpose that could bring the war to an early and victorious conclusion.

President Diem rebutted these points in some detail and displayed no interest in seeking solutions or mending his ways. He said the departure from office of Foreign Minister Vu Van Mau was dictated by personal and not political considerations. His wife's family seemed to be foredoomed to violent deaths. One of them had died in an airplane accident. Others had met other violent deaths. Mau's wife thought that there must be some kind of a curse on the family and urged her husband to make a vow to make a pilgrimage to lift the curse. Diem remarked that during his tenure as Foreign Minister, Mau was often out of the office. When Diem asked where he was, he learned he was at his home, urging his mother to take nourishment or his wife to look after her health. The wife had had one serious operation after another—Diem implied it was lung cancer, but did not specifically so state.

With regard to the relief of Tran Van Chuong as Ambassador at Washington, Diem stated that the Cabinet had voted unanimously to relieve him. Foreign Minister Vu Van Mau, who was present, had voted in favor of relieving him, too.

As for the university and the student unrest in general, Diem explained that the student body and even the faculty were most immature, untrained and irresponsible. He repeated that Viet-Nam was an underdeveloped country, with almost no suitable staff for its universities. He said the dean of the Science Faculty at the University of Saigon was only 32 years old. He said the students who demonstrated against the government had been misled by troublemakers both in the student body and in the faculty. The government had no choice but to arrest the students. Shortly afterwards (after this benevolent attention of a benevolent government, he implied) the students recognized the error of their ways, and felt duped and cheated by those who had misled them. They cursed their former leaders, and sang the praises of the government; many of them were now pro-government in their attitudes. He said that few of the high school teachers were qualified for their jobs, and students and teachers alike were inexperienced politically. Again, by serene tone and manner he indicated that he had satisfactorily explained away whatever misunderstanding it was that might have been bothering his guests.

The Secretary said that no small part of the Vietnamese government's difficulties with public opinion in the United States came from the ill-advised and unfortunate declarations of Madame Nhu. The Secretary took from his pocket a newspaper clipping and said that as he boarded his aircraft in Washington he had been greeted by the following. He read a report of Mme. Nhu's statement to the effect that American junior officers in Viet-Nam were behaving like little soldiers of fortune, etc.³

The Secretary emphasized, and the Ambassador confirmed his remarks, that such outbursts were most offensive to American public opinion. The Secretary said that the American people would flatly refuse to send out the best of their young officers to face mortal perils to support an effort that had such irresponsible spokesmen. One of the Americans present asked flatly if there were not something the government could do to shut her up. At this point Diem seemed to be just a bit weary and a bit on the defensive. His glances and manner suggested that perhaps for the first time in the whole conversation, he at least saw what his guests were talking about, especially when the Ambassador remarked that Mme. Chiang Kai-shek had played a decisive part in losing China to the Communists.

But nevertheless he rose to the defense routinely and with his standard and well-known arguments. Mme. Nhu was a member of parliament. She had a right to speak her mind, both as a member of parliament and as a

member of a free society. Furthermore, one cannot deny a lady the right to defend herself when she has been unjustly attacked. Mme. Nhu had been under a merciless and scurrilous press attack for many months, and if she became exasperated, that had to be understood. Finally, he asked if the Secretary had read Mme. Nhu's denial.⁴ Again, very sure of himself, Diem indicated that a careful reading of the denial, or more accurately the explanatory statement, would clarify the matter and allay his interlocutor's anxieties.

The Secretary indicated that this was not satisfactory and that the problems of which he spoke were real and serious and would have to be solved before the war could be won or before Viet-Nam could be sure of the continued American support that he sincerely hoped it would merit and receive.

The Buddhist Controversy

While on the subject of the inaccuracies and injustices of the press treatment of his government, President Diem held forth at considerable length on the Buddhist controversy. He acknowledged that he bore a certain responsibility in all this: He had been too kind to the Buddhists. He had given them so much assistance that the number of Buddhist temples in the country had doubled during his administration.

Diem spoke for some twenty minutes on the Buddhist problem, but said almost nothing that had not figured in the controlled-press handling of the matter. He repeated the allegations of orgies in pagodas, and emphasized that the heart of the problem was the fact that "anyone could become a bonze (priest) who shaved his head and acquired a yellow robe." He said that one of the three bonzes who took refuge in the American Embassy had been a policeman until he was expelled from the force two years ago for unsuitability and poor performance. He had become a vagabond until some two or three months ago, when he proclaimed himself a bonze and took refuge in the Embassy. Diem said the Buddhists were very publicity-conscious, and even had a man dress in European clothes in order better to get through a police cordon in front of USIS. This man then put on his robe, which he had carried concealed, and took off his wig and broke out various anti-regime streamers and slogans.

At this point Diem added darkly that "some American services in Saigon" were engaged in anti-regime plotting and that he was "preparing a dossier" and might return to the subject in due course. He offered no

further explanation, and none was sought; he passed on quickly to continue his tirade against the Buddhists.

He said that most of the Buddhist sects in Viet-Nam support the government's position and deplore the attitude of the irresponsible extremist minority that is making all the trouble. He said that part of the Buddhists' trouble lay in too rapid growth and lack of organization. For example, he said, no records are kept on who is or is not a bonze, and there are no universally accepted standards for ordainment. He proposed to help the Buddhists by assisting them in setting up a national register of all bonzes. Work on this project had already started, and would be pushed vigorously.

At about this point one of the Americans noted that things were in such bad shape that the United Nations were considering sending a delegation to study the problem of repression of the Buddhists. Diem said very quickly, "Well let them come and see for themselves, we will let them see what the real situation is."

Diem warned that the Viet Cong were quick to take advantage of the disorders caused by the Buddhists. He said that at the time of raids on the pagodas and the proclamation of martial law—August 21, 1963—the Viet Cong brought four field radio sets into the outskirts of Saigon—much closer than they had dared come before. They felt that if the disturbances were to increase, they could do this with impunity. By August 25, they saw that the disturbances were not spreading and pulled their radios back to where they had been before. Diem also said that the Buddhist organization based in Ceylon was Communist-dominated, and that he had learned from an unimpeachable German source that one Buddhist priest traveling to Viet-Nam from abroad was a Communist. For all these reasons, Diem said, the Vietnamese armed forces and police had made a united front in imploring him to proclaim martial law and allow them to suppress the disorders which a few Buddhist extremists were creating.

General Taylor recapitulated the points made by the Ambassador and the Secretary, and reminded President Diem that regardless of the explanations he offered for the disorders, a serious crisis of confidence was developing in the United States and it was vital for the government of Viet-Nam to respond to this legitimate anxiety.

The Secretary closed by repeating once again that he had made his representations as a friend who sincerely wished to help the Vietnamese

in their war effort. There was no note of strain or unfriendliness on either side. The Secretary and the Ambassador noted that they were expected back at the Palace in two hours for dinner, and expressed their pleasure at this prospect.

Throughout the meetings Secretary Thuan said nothing.

Comment: Secretary McNamara made very clear to President Diem the United States Government's disapproval of the situation in Viet-Nam. It must have been clear to Diem that there was no rift between the Departments of State and of Defense. The Ambassador observed that Diem appeared much younger and brighter than at the last two meetings at which he had seen him. Diem offered absolutely no assurances that he would take any steps in response to the representations made to him by his American visitors. In fact, he said nothing to indicate or acknowledge that he had received even friendly advice. His manner was one of at least outward serenity and of a man who had patiently explained a great deal and who hoped he had thus corrected a number of misapprehensions.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 7 US/McNamara. Secret. Drafted by Flott and transmitted to the Department of State as an enclosure to airgram A-244 from Saigon, October 3. According to the airgram, the memorandum was not cleared with the participants. A summary of the conversation was transmitted in telegram 612 from Saigon. (*Ibid.*, ORG 7 OSD) The meeting was held at the Gia Long Palace. A record of this discussion is printed in part in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, vol. II, pp. 749-751.

² Document 159.

³ Madame Nhu is reported to have stated in late September 1963 that younger American officers in Vietnam "are acting like little soldiers of fortune. They do not know what is going on. With their irresponsible behavior, they have forced senior officers into following a confused policy." (As quoted in Sobel (ed.), *South Vietnam, 1961-65*, p. 75)

⁴ Not further identified.

159. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, September 30, 1963, 7 p.m.

613. CINCPAC for POLAD.

1. McNamara, Taylor, and I had conversation with Vice President Tho. He opened up conversation immediately by recalling that two years ago he had said to General Taylor that the American effort in Vietnam should have three characteristics: It should be rapid; it should be efficient; it should be intelligent. We had succeeded in the first two parts but had failed in the third: we are not using our strength intelligently.
2. When asked to elaborate on this. He said that it was obvious that police state methods were being used and that this was creating deep discontent and yet we were unable to do anything about it. He felt sorry to speak so frankly, but the situation was very serious.
3. When asked to say what we should do to be intelligent and to make our influence effective, he said that he did not feel free to tell us. It was his duty not to set himself apart from the President, that he had already gone very far in saying what he had.
4. We pressed him hard on different methods which had been proposed. He agreed that protestations and words by Ambassadors and others were totally ineffective. He said that withholding economic aid would do nothing since we had inflation already; introduction of US troops would be "idiotic" as would be an attempt by the US to organize a coup d'etat.
5. When we asked him if there were any Vietnamese or foreigners in Saigon whose advice we should seek, he said that the best people were out of the country but that they could not advise us on details. When asked to suggest persons out of the country, he suggested Vu Van Mau.
6. When asked whether it was true that all the dissatisfaction was in the cities and that there was none in the villages, he said that this was not true, that he had spent his life in the villages of the southern part of country and knew them intimately. There was serious discontent in the villages, but not because of the police state methods being used in the cities. The villager is discontented for several reasons: first, he feels he has to pay too much money to the local village agent who is

demanding much more than the 100 plasters and ten days of work which the villager had agreed to do. Then, said Tho, when the villager leaves his hamlet in the morning to go out to work in the field, he meets the Viet Cong who forces him to pay another set of taxes.

7. When General Taylor remarked that this should not happen in a well fortified hamlet, Tho said that it did not happen in the hamlet-it happened when the villager steps out of the hamlet and goes into the field.
8. When General Taylor said that in a properly defended hamlet this should not happen, Tho said: Why, General Taylor, there are not more than 20 to 30 properly defended hamlets in the whole country.
9. With some warmth he said: Why do you gentlemen think that the Viet Cong is still so popular? Two years ago there were between 20-30,000 in the Viet Cong army; for these last two years we have been killing a thousand a month; and yet the Viet Cong is even larger today. Why is this true?
10. When General Taylor and I suggested it might be intimidation, Tho said: Intimidation can make them join, but it cannot stop them from running away. While some of them do run away, there are many who stay. Why is this?
11. When I suggested that it might be the promises that the Viet Cong make, Tho said: They cannot promise a thing-neither food nor shelter nor security. The answer is that they stay in the Viet Cong army because they want to, and the reason they want to is their extreme discontent with the Government of Vietnam.
12. *Comment:* Vice President Tho evidently wants us to straighten out the whole situation here and yet does not hesitate to disapprove of any methods of doing so. But his analysis of village attitudes is worthy of consideration.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, ORG 7 OSD. Secret; Limit Distribution. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to the White House.

160. Memorandum of a Conversation by the Secretary of Defense (McNamara)¹

Saigon, September 30, 1963.

Point 1. [less than 1 line not declassified] resources include [less than 1 line not declassified] scattered throughout the country and university professors at Dalat, Hue, and Saigon. Many if not most of these men have had experience in Communist China as a basis for comparison with South Vietnam.

Point 2. What one sees in South Vietnam is scenery but underneath the apparent calm of the surface is a "turning of the screw" which is increasing with control of the government over the people. The machinery to dominate the people is as perfect as that employed by the Communists. The government has established a police State although the family has successfully disguised this fact. [less than 1 line not declassified] will send us a list of examples of police state actions in South Vietnam.

Point 3. At first, people who had been tortured were afraid to speak out but now they are willing to do so. "Absolutely people have been tortured." He "is so harassed and bothered by the situation that he is asking himself should not the Church speak out and publicize it before the world?"

Point 4. When the [less than 1 line not declassified] arrived, the regime and the Church sat in the witness box together but now he is separated. The government has gone so far as to censor the Pope's speeches.

Point 5. The torturing of prisoners is continuing and is applied to any adversary of the regime. The students and the intellectuals see all adversaries being eliminated. They see no help from the Church and the US. Therefore, they are forced to other solutions: some are going and will continue to go to the Viet Cong but more are turning to neutralists. With neutralism they believe "we will have no more war and at least a hope to topple the regime". They "prefer the devil we do not know to the one we do".

Point 6. The intellectuals believe the continued presence of Diem could be useful (they say he is not very intelligent but that he does have the respect of many of the people). What they believe is that if the family stays they (the intellectuals) will be working for the Communists.

Point 7. If the United States and the Church do not find a solution, they are working for the Communists. We could lose the country to the Communists even though we continue to have technical military successes. [less than 1 line not declassified] stated he was a Sicilian who knows the mentality of the Mafia. Here it is big Mafia, the Viet Cong. At a certain time all is quiet because the Mafia has given the order to make it so. But if the policy of the Mafia changes the calm disappears and unrest erupts. In South Vietnam, there are districts which we believe to be quiet but this is so only because the Viet Cong have an interest to make it appear so. Through the [less than 1 line not declassified] knows there are many districts where all appears tranquil, where people are working, and where VC attacks have dropped off but where there are many VC simply biding their time and the people appear to denounce them.

Point 8. If Nhu achieves complete power, the first thing he will do is to ask the United States to go home, and then he will make a deal with the Communists because he believes he could then become boss of all of Vietnam, but, of course, the Communists would never permit him to do so.

Point 9. The ideas that Nhu is teaching the republican youth are strongly Communist ideology—as laying the basis for Communism.

Point 10. There is time to save South Vietnam but it requires that we change Nhu immediately. The results would be so advantageous that it is worth running the risk. There would be some disorder but the gain would be worth it.

Point 11. Nobody, no Bishop, has sufficient courage to contradict Thuc. He has struck fear in the heart of all

Point 12. It is impossible to reason with Nhu, Madame Nhu, and Thuc. They refuse to accept the advice of [less than 1 line not declassified]. It is too late to lead them to modify the policies. The only way to change the situation is to force Nhu to leave.

Point 13. It is difficult to predict how the Army will behave if the Nhu's continue in power because of “double controls” similar to but more effective than those in the Soviet Army. The authority of the generals is limited. They are moved around frequently to limit their power and the regime holds back from combat at all times certain units to utilize in support of the cell.

Point 14. People are not sure of the position of the United States because in November 1960 and February '62, the United States appeared to support the government against those who wished to overthrow it. The people believe the Americans think that (the Americans) were wrong in criticizing Nhu, the elections are over, the Buddhist problem solved (this is of course nothing but scenery), and all is well.

Point 15. The United States government has not been speaking with one voice in Saigon. This has blurred US policy in the minds of the potential opposition and has confused the people.

Robert S. McNamara²

¹ Source: Washington Federal Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, Back-up Documents and Notes 9/25/63-Trip to SVN. Secret.

² Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

161. Memorandum by the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' Special Assistant (Sullivan)¹

Saigon, September 30, 1963.

I talked at length with the French Charge, the Canadian ICC Commissioner, and the Indian ICC Commissioner on the subject of relations between North and South Vietnam. All of them were inclined to doubt that there was much substance in current rumors about a Nhu-Ho deal. However, all of them insisted that we should not discount the possibility of such a deal in the future. (The French Charge said "three or four months.")

Their reasoning was similar. All of them felt the North was hurting very badly economically and was aware that the Viet Cong was losing the battle in the South. They therefore concluded that, in return for two stipulations, the North would be willing to negotiate a cease fire agreement with the South. These two stipulations are: North-South trade and the departure of U.S. forces.

An additional factor which [*less than 1 line not declassified*] felt might impel the North to such a deal was Chinese pressure. If U.S. forces could be removed from Vietnam, the Chinese might ease somewhat their pressure on Hanoi and grant them a greater measure of autonomy.

All three felt Brother Nhu might be willing to make such a deal for two reasons. First, his supreme confidence in being able to "beat the Communists at their own game"; and second, his desire to be rid of the Americans. The French Charge admitted that Ambassador Lalouette had talked with Nhu in these terms. Both Nhu and Lalouette had concluded that the progress of the war, prior to recent events, was such that a deal could probably safely be negotiated by the end of this year. Nhu's subsequent disclosure of these talks to Alsop² has embarrassed the French and they now say they distrust Nhu's ultimate intentions.

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, Back up Documents and Notes, 9/25/63-Trip to SVN. Top Secret.

² See [footnote 2, Document 151](#).

162. Memorandum for the Record by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Saigon, October 1, 1963.

SUBJECT

Farewell Call on Major General Duong Van Minh (Big Minh) 1 October 1963

1. In the course of my farewell call on General Minh and in response to my questions, the following points came out: (Also present was Colonel Raymond Jones, Assistant J-3, Hq MACV.)
 - a. General Minh as always is deeply concerned over the country. He considers that many difficulties remain in the military program. There hasn't been enough understanding between the population and the armed forces in the field. There is still no unimpeded channel of military command from Saigon to the field. There is divided responsibility between the military commanders and the provincial officials. All of these circumstances make ultimate success doubtful to General Minh.
 - b. With regard to the Buddhist difficulties, General Minh considers that the matter is basically a struggle for special privileges between Buddhists and Catholics. Many provincial officials are favoring the Catholics in granting the many forms of government permits controlling commercial transactions, travel, and the like. There has been no obstacle to the practice of the Buddhist religion but individuals have been jailed for contributing money to the Pagodas. General Minh feels that this Buddhist issue has not yet cropped up in the Armed Forces but he is always afraid that it may at any time.
 - c. The student riots reflect the resentment of parents for the many forms of injustice perpetrated by the central government. There has been some Communist inspiration behind the demonstrations but the basic cause is this sense of injustice which permeates most of the urban society.
 - d. General Minh has no solution for the unhappy conditions which he perceives. He understands the difficulty of the United States in manipulating the aid program to influence the Diem government. It would be tragic, he feels, to retard the military campaign by a cut back in aid. He sees no opposition to the present government which might rally domestic and foreign support.

- e. I told General Minh that he could always communicate with me on any subject through General Harkins.
- 2. In summary, General Minh sees his country in chains with no way to shake them off.

M. D. T.²

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, Back-up Documents and Notes, 9/25/63-Trip to SVN. Secret. This was the second private meeting between Taylor and Minh. The first, as Taylor recounts in *Swords and Plowshares*, pp. 297-298, was on the tennis court at the Saigon Officers Club on September 29 with Secretary McNamara as a spectator. The two Americans were under the impression Minh had an important message for them, but Minh refused to be drawn out by what Taylor later described as "broad hints of our interest in other subjects which we gave him during breaks in the game." In a memorandum to McNamara, September 30, Taylor explained the misunderstanding as follows:

"Colonel Jones, one of our tennis players yesterday, at my request, contacted Big Minh last night to probe the situation with him. He reports that Big Minh was confused yesterday as to what was taking place. He gave Jones no impression of having sent word to see you and me. As far as he was concerned, the occasion was simply a game of tennis. He indicated that he has no message to communicate to me now but would be very glad to discuss the military situation at any time. He sees no problem in my calling on him or in his coming to see me." (National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-186-69)

² Printed from a copy that bears these typed initials.

163. Letter From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) to President Diem¹

Saigon, October 1, 1963.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: This letter responds to our conversation after your dinner on 29 September² in which you kindly expressed an interest in receiving my professional comments on the military situation as I observed it during visits in the past week to all the corps and divisions of your Army and to many of the provinces under attack by the Viet Cong. As I mentioned to you, the primary purpose of these visits was to determine the rate of progress being made by our common effort toward victory over the insurgency. I would define victory in this context as being the reduction of the insurgency to proportions manageable by the National Security Forces normally available to your Government.

To keep the length of this letter within bounds, I shall not dwell on the many encouraging indications of military progress since my visit of last September. Certainly, if one looks back to October 1961 when we first discussed the expansion of the U.S. Military Aid and laid the groundwork for the Counterinsurgency Program now in course of implementation, the advances made in defeating the enemy in the field and giving security to the rural population in strategic hamlets testify to the basic soundness of the agreed program. It was not until the recent political disturbances beginning in May and continuing through August and beyond that I personally had any doubt as to the ultimate success of our campaign against the Viet Cong.

Now, as Secretary McNamara has told you, a serious doubt hangs over our hopes for the future. Can we win together in the face of the reaction to the measures taken by your Government against the Buddhists and the students? As a military man I would say that we can win providing there are no further political setbacks. The military indicators are still generally favorable and can be made more so by actions readily within the power of your Government. If you will allow me, I would mention a few of the military actions which I believe necessary for this improvement.

The military situation in the I, II, and III Corps areas is generally good. It is true that there are never enough offensive actions against the

enemy to satisfy one who believes that only a ruthless, tireless offensive can win this war. The record of one of the divisions in the III Corps falls notably short of the minimum standard for mobile actions in the field set by your High Command—twenty days out of every thirty. As a result, some of the hard core war zones of the Viet Cong remain virtually untouched. In my opinion, the full potential of the military units in this area is not being exploited.

But as you have recognized, your principal military problems are now in the Delta. I am convinced that your decision last year was sound in giving top priority to resisting the desire of the enemy to cut through to the coast in the II Corps area and thus divide the country. The success in frustrating this tactic was achieved at the expense of the campaign in the south where the Viet Cong have always had their principal sources of strength. Now, I feel sure, the time has come to regroup our forces and place the center of gravity of our efforts in the IV Corps area. You have wisely recognized this need for readjustment by ordering the 9th Division to the south. I feel that other measures with a similar purpose are or soon will be necessary. I have in mind actions such as an overhaul of the hamlet program in such provinces as Long An and Kien Tuong where the work has gone either too fast or too slow—in either case, with the effect of delaying the attainment of an adequate system of completed hamlets meeting the standards set by your Government. Related to the requirements of a successful hamlet program is the need for a methodical clear-and-hold campaign by the tactical units of the IV Corps. I have a feeling that, in the past, there has been an inclination to favor the rapid, sweeping operations which have little permanent effect in securing a base for the erection of secure hamlets.

You know full well the nature of the terrain of the Delta. Even to the casual visitor, it is apparent that we must learn to use the numerous waterways of the region as highways to open up controlled territory and at the same time to interdict the water-borne movement of the enemy. I doubt that we have given enough attention to small boat operations directed at exploiting these waterways in support of the campaign.

The kind of war we are fighting in the Delta is a small unit war, fought principally by small infantry-type organizations. These are the forces which bear the brunt of combat and take the inevitable losses. Yet I found on my recent visit that the infantry companies in the Delta and elsewhere are often less than two-thirds of authorized strength—a hundred men for duty out of a company of an authorized strength of about 150 men. The diversion of military manpower between the point of

intake and the front-line is a problem of all armies in time of war. I would suggest that you may desire a close examination of this problem in your Army. Headquarters soldiers do not hurt the Viet Cong—infantrymen with rifles in the jungle do.

In closing, Mr. President, may I give you my most important overall impression? Up to now, the battle against the Viet Cong has seemed endless; no one has been willing to set a date for its successful conclusion. After talking to scores of officers, Vietnamese and American, I am convinced that the Viet Cong insurgency in the north and center can be reduced to little more than sporadic incidents by the end of 1964. The Delta will take longer but should be completed by the end of 1965. But for these predictions to be valid, certain conditions must be met. Your Government should be prepared to energize all agencies, military and civil, to a higher output of activity than up to now. Ineffective commanders and province officials must be replaced as soon as identified. Finally, there should be a restoration of domestic tranquillity on the homefront if political tensions are to be allayed and external criticism is to abate. Conditions are needed for the creation of an atmosphere conducive to an effective campaign directed at the objective, vital to both of us, of defeating the Viet Cong and of restoring peace to your country.

I hope, Mr. President, that you will accept these frank comments as those of an old friend of South Vietnam and an admirer of its courageous resistance to the common enemy. Both of our countries have put too much into this war to be satisfied now with less than a victorious conclusion. I am convinced that the energized program outlined above can achieve the success which we seek.

With respectful regards,

Maxwell D. Taylor³

¹ Source: National Defense university, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Top secret. A typewritten note on the source text reads: "Following Letter from General Taylor to President Diem being delivered 2 October with approval of secretary McNamara and concurrence of Ambassador Lodge."

² No contemporary record to this conversation has been found, but Taylor recounts a final meeting in *Swords and Plowshares*, p. 298.

³ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

164. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) to the Acting Secretary of State¹

Washington, October 1, 1963.

SUBJECT

Possible Political Proposals at the United Nations General Assembly re Viet-Nam

It is possible that during the UNGA consideration of the Ceylonese resolution on human rights in South Viet-Nam² certain political suggestions regarding Viet-Nam may be made by other delegations. If any formal proposals are made they would, of course, be referred to the Department by USUN for instructions.

It may well be, however, that political suggestions or comments regarding Viet-Nam may be made as obiter dicta in speeches to the General Assembly or during corridor conversations. It would seem desirable that we have approved lines of reply for U.S. representatives to use at their discretion to insure that U.S. views are clearly known before ideas and positions of other delegations crystallize.

The anticipated suggestions from other delegations and proposed U.S. lines of reply are as follows:

1. Withdrawal of U.S. forces from Viet-Nam.

Proposed U.S. Response: As President Kennedy stated in December, 1961,³ "The United States, like the Republic of Viet-Nam, remains devoted to the cause of peace and our primary purpose is to help [South Viet-Nam's]⁴ people maintain their independence. If the Communist authorities in North Viet-Nam will stop their campaign to destroy the Republic of Viet-Nam, the measures we are taking to assist [South Viet-Nam's] defense efforts will no longer be necessary." Thus, if the Communist regime in Hanoi will cease and desist in its subversive aggression against the Republic of Viet-Nam, the United States can withdraw its forces from that country.

2. Neutralization of South Viet-Nam

Proposed U.S. Response: Neutralization of South Viet-Nam alone would pave the way for an early Communist take-over of that area. Without external assistance the armed forces of South Viet-Nam could not withstand the aggressive pressures of the much larger armed forces of the Communist regime in North Viet-Nam. Moreover, the Hanoi regime, as is currently obvious, has developed an extensive subversive and guerrilla network in South Viet-Nam which could at any time overthrow the government of a neutral South Viet-Nam.

If there is to be any discussion of the neutralization of Viet-Nam, it can only be in terms of the neutralization of all of Viet-Nam when the Communists in North Viet-Nam are prepared to agree to give up political power and control in their zone.

3. Elections for the Reunification of Viet-Nam

Proposed U.S. Response: We support the position of the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam that elections can be held only when there is real assurance that the electorate in North Viet-Nam will be free of coercion.⁵

¹ Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, Organizations and Alignments. Secret. Drafted by Mendenhall with the concurrences of Woodruff Wallner, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, and William B. Buffum, Deputy Director of the Office of United Nations Political Affairs. Sent through Harriman.

² As of October 1, the Ceylonese draft resolution was being modified in informal negotiations. In the resolution, the General Assembly expressed its concern "with the serious violation of the human rights of the vast majority of people" of South Vietnam. The second operative paragraph requested the Secretary-General: "To communicate this res to authorities of South Vietnam, to consult with them with a view to alleviating the situation, to take all appropriate steps to help restore the human rights of the people of SVN, and to keep the GA informed of developments relating to this situation." The draft resolution was transmitted in telegram 1076 from USUN, October 1. (*Ibid.*, Central Files, SOC 14-1 S VIET)

³ For text of this statement, Kennedy's part of an exchange of messages with Diem, December 15, 1961, see Public Papers of the Presidents of the

United States: John F. Kennedy, 1961, p. 801.

⁴ All brackets are in the source text.

⁵ Harriman initialed his approval of all three proposals.

165. Telegram From the Department of State to the Mission at the United Nations¹

Washington, October 1, 1963—8:37 p.m.

Tosec 105. USUN please pass Secretary for 3 pm Oct 2 meeting with Buu Hoi.² Ambassador Buu Hoi called on Hilsman Sept 30. Conversation dealt exclusively with internal Viet-Nam situation and US-GVN relations. (Conversations here with Buu Hoi on UN aspects being communicated to you by septel.)³

Hilsman made following major points. Buu Hoi subsequently informed us he had immediately reported by cable to Diem.

1. U.S. opinion had been and remained deeply affected by repressions against religious and student groups which inexplicable to US public in light of major burden we undertaking on side of Vietnamese in effort to win war against Communists.
2. As President said, GVN needs broadest possible political support to win war and therefore should make changes of policy and perhaps personnel. Our own policy insofar as GVN concerned clearly stated by President; we support what furthers war effort; we oppose what hinders it.
3. Rightly or wrongly, GVN's present image is unfavorable and positive steps must be taken to change it. There should be far less talk on part of GVN personalities and more action. President should now generously dramatize desire for conciliation. Calling Buddhist priests Communists is not answer. Answer lies instead in releasing them and students on wide scale. President should bring eminent individuals into a broadened and rejuvenated cabinet.

In his responses, Buu Hoi indicated religious part of crisis over even before pagoda raids August 20. Crisis had become entirely political and bonzes had overextended position to point where govt had to force showdown to survive. As Buddhist and humanist, Buu Hoi regretted deplorable manner in which pagoda raids carried out. He noted that aged Venerable Khiet had now reversed his position and that by letter of September 27 to Diem Bonze Chau had done same. (For Saigon: Please report text this letter if available.)⁴ While Government's actions up to and including martial law were excusable on grounds survival, he agreed in

large part that now government must start on new basis and that broadening and reform have become utterly essential. Deplored lack trained people in administration and services. Stated current problem boiled down to one of personnel: finding right people and letting them do job without constant interference and favoritism. Hoped that new Assembly would assume active role and thereby reveal to world that changes are occurring. Did not think there would be real problem in overhauling government, but that bringing conviction of change to countryside and outlying areas would, as before, be real difficulty. Said too many projects always remained paper projects, breaking down in implementation.

Buu Hoi queried Hilsman re USG attitude towards Nhu and his departure. Hilsman replied that US officials felt Nhu had made important contribution to strategic hamlet program but that he had apparently become political symbol to many Vietnamese. If this true President Diem should consider Nhu's future role very carefully. Buu Hoi said Nhu's talents cannot be spared but that his only ambition was to work in narrowly prescribed field of his interests. Hilsman said that if Nhu's role was to be limited President might consider how to dramatize this, perhaps through device of period of study abroad concerned with limited role Buu Hoi described.

In separate subsequent private conversation with Department officer, Buu Hoi urged strongly that we bring Diem specific suggestions for government reform in structure and functioning. Wished in particular to suggest (asking this not be repeated as coming from him) that we should work toward elevation of Nguyen Dinh Thuan as Prime Minister actively charged with all affairs of government. Indicated we should under no circumstances, however, mention Thuan or any other name directly to Diem. Buu Hoi feels Diem should play increasingly more distant ruler role, with Nhu's job defined as something like "Government Planning Director".

In Secretary's conversation with Buu Hoi, aside from UN aspects, Secretary might wish range generally over same points covered by Hilsman and perhaps endeavor draw out Buu Hoi further on specific notions government reform. Secretary might wish keep in mind Buu Hoi is prominent scientist in field tropical dermatology and leprosy, whose diplomatic activity only small adjunct to scientific work based in Paris laboratory. Buu Hoi was last in Saigon during August in vain attempt mediate Buddhist crisis but successful effort persuade his mother not commit suicide by fire. He prefers continue to work within existing VN

government framework, though is at heart strong opponent many aspects of regime. We do not know to what degree he retains full confidence of Diem and Nhu, although we believe they regard him as too useful and essential to afford lose his services.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central files, SOC 14-1 S VIET-US. Secret; Priority. Drafted by Kattenburg and Hilsman and signed by Ball. Also sent to Saigon and repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD.

² See [Document 168](#).

³ In telegram 894 to USUN, October 1, the Department sent the Mission at the United Nations a summary of Assistant Secretary Harlan Cleveland's conversation with Buu Hoi on U.N. matters affecting South Vietnam. Buu Hoi informed Cleveland that South Vietnam would welcome a visit by an informal group of countries to get the facts on the Buddhist situation. Buu Hoi believed such a visit would have an ameliorating effect on concern about the Buddhist crisis at the United Nations, and hoped Secretary-General U Thant would arrange it. The visit proposal was the result of a genuine desire by South Vietnam to show the world that the Buddhist crisis was over, but Buu Hoi noted the Ceylonese resolution should not be debated until the group returned. The Department of State agreed and suggested to USUN that if U Thant was willing to accept and sponsor the idea, the Mission should discreetly work for postponement of consideration of the Ceylonese resolution. (Department of State, Central Files, SOC 14-1 S VIET)

⁴ In telegram 621 from Saigon, October 2, the Embassy reported as follows:

"Letter from Thich Tam Chau to Diem has not yet been publicized. CAS has received info evaluated as probably true that for seven or eight days preceding September 24 Chau was hospitalized and being fed intravenously as result his refusal to accept food. While this info does not logically preclude such letter from being written, it would throw doubt on its authenticity or on circumstances under which written." (*Ibid.*)

166. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State
for International Organization Affairs (Cleveland) to the
Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs
(Hilsman)¹

Washington, October 2, 1963.

SUBJECT
Buu Hoi Visit

After our long and useful discussion with Buu Hoi in my office this morning, I had a short, private *tete-a-tete* with him. I wanted to be sure that he understood that we have wanted to be helpful to him on the procedure he is floating in New York (which is described as he described it in our reporting cable to Stevenson),² but that we could not be caught in the role of an apologist for the Viet Nam Government on the substance of the matter, as long as most of the world is convinced that the GVN has been persecuting Buddhists.

I took the occasion also to ask, in the politest and most Oriental fashion you can imagine, whether steps were being taken to tone down Madame Nhu's public utterances, at least on this particular subject, while she is in the United States. Buu Hoia said quite frankly that in his judgment she had done much damage with her statements. He agreed that the word "barbeque" had been especially damaging; he complained that she did not even know the word, which would not be as colorful in the French language, but had picked it up from "an English language publication in Saigon", by which I suppose he means the American edited Times of Viet Nam.

Buu Hoia went on to say that he had fully reported the nature of the damage since his arrival here; he had sent in five reports just on this subject, he said. Instructions had already gone to Madame Nhu to quiet down but in view of the interest of the U.S. press he did not see what practical effect they would have. He said, a little wistfully, that he did not suppose it would be possible to persuade the press to take no interest in her.

Finally, he made a practical suggestion that we could perhaps help them do what he has been trying to do, without too much success, in talking

with representatives of the U.S. press. He has been trying to emphasize, he said, that he himself has been especially sent to the UN to handle this question, that he and what he says represents the Government of Viet Nam, and that Madame Nhu is traveling in a private capacity and is not speaking for the Government. He conceded that this was a hard sale, but asked that we do our best.

It does seem to me that we can be a little bit helpful in this by emphasizing to editors and correspondents—particularly the editors and particularly in New York—that Buu Hoia is the man who is talking responsibly for the Government of Viet Nam and that his responsible and sophisticated attempts to deal with the situation should not be interfered with by press magnification of quotable comments by a lady who is unfortunately too beautiful to ignore. I passed this suggestion along to Governor Stevenson. You will know best what to do with it on this end.

HC

¹ Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 64 D 54, POL 7 Visits Meetings (to U.S.). Confidential. Drafted by Cleveland on October 2. Copies were sent to Ball, Harriman, Stevenson, and Rusk.

² Document 165.

167. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) and the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President¹

Washington, October 2, 1963.

SUBJECT

Report of McNamara-Taylor Mission to South Vietnam

Your memorandum of 21 September 1963² directed that General Taylor and Secretary McNamara proceed to South Vietnam to appraise the military and para-military effort to defeat the Viet Cong and to consider, in consultation with Ambassador Lodge, related political and social questions. You further directed that, if the prognosis in our judgment was not hopeful, we should present our views of what action must be taken by the South Vietnam Government and what steps our Government should take to lead the Vietnamese to that action.

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

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

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

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusions.

1. The military campaign has made great progress and continues to progress.
2. There are serious political tensions in Saigon (and perhaps elsewhere in South Vietnam) where the Diem-Nhu government is becoming increasingly unpopular.
3. There is no solid evidence of the possibility of a successful coup, although assassination of Diem or Nhu is always a possibility.

4. Although some, and perhaps an increasing number, of GVN military officers are becoming hostile to the government, they are more hostile to the Viet Cong than to the government and at least for the near future they will continue to perform their military duties.
5. Further repressive actions by Diem and Nhu could change the present favorable military trends. On the other hand, a return to more moderate methods of control and administration, unlikely though it may be, would substantially mitigate the political crisis.
6. It is not clear that pressures exerted by the U.S. will move Diem and Nhu toward moderation. Indeed, pressures may increase their obduracy. But unless such pressures are exerted, they are almost certain to continue past patterns of behavior.

B. Recommendations.

We recommend that:

1. General Harkins review with Diem the military changes necessary to complete the military campaign in the Northern and Central areas (I, II, and III Corps) by the end of 1964, and in the Delta (IV Corps) by the end of 1965. This review would consider the need for such changes as:
 - a. A further shift of military emphasis and strength to the Delta (IV Corps).
 - b. An increase in the military tempo in all corps areas, so that all combat troops are in the field an average of 20 days out of 30 and static missions are ended.
 - c. Emphasis on "clear and hold operations" instead of terrain sweeps which have little permanent value.
 - d. The expansion of personnel in combat units to full authorized strength.
 - e. The training and arming of hamlet militia to 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. 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.
- 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.³

As we pursue these courses of action, the situation must be closely watched to see what steps Diem is taking to reduce repressive practices and to improve the effectiveness of the military effort. We should set no fixed criteria, but recognize that we would have to decide in 2-4

months whether to move to more drastic action or try to carry on with Diem even if he had not taken significant steps.

5. At this time, no initiative should be taken to encourage actively a change in government. Our policy should be to seek urgently to identify and build contacts with an alternative leadership if and when it appears.
6. The following statement be approved as current U.S. policy toward South Vietnam and constitute the substance of the government position to be presented both in Congressional testimony and in public statements.
 - a. The security of South Vietnam remains vital to United States security. For this reason, we adhere to the overriding objective of denying this country to Communism and of suppressing the Viet Cong insurgency as promptly as possible. (By suppressing the insurgency we mean reducing it to proportions manageable by the national security forces of the GVN, unassisted by the presence of U.S. military forces.) We believe the U.S. part of the task can be completed by the end of 1965, the terminal date which we are taking as the time objective of our counterinsurgency programs.
 - b. The military program in Vietnam has made progress and is sound in principle.
 - c. The political situation in Vietnam remains deeply serious. It has not yet significantly affected the military effort, but could do so at some time in the future. If the result is a GVN ineffective in the conduct of the war, the U.S. will review its attitude toward support for the government. Although we are deeply concerned by repressive practices, effective performance in the conduct of the war should be the determining factor in our relations with the GVN.
 - d. The U.S. has expressed its disapproval of certain actions of the Diem-Nhu regime and will do so again if required. Our policy is to seek to bring about the abandonment of repression because of its effect on the popular will to resist. Our means consist of expressions of disapproval and the withholding of support from GVN activities that are not clearly contributing to the war effort. We will use these means as required to assure an effective military program.

[Here follow Sections II, "Military Situation and Trends," III, "Economic Situation and Trends," IV, "Political Situation and Trends," and V, "Effect on Political Tension."]

VI. OVERALL EVALUATION

From the above analysis it is clear that the situation requires a constant effort by the U.S. to obtain a reduction of political tensions and improved performance by the Vietnamese Government. We cannot say with assurance whether the effort against the Viet Cong will ultimately fail in the absence of major political improvements. However, it does seem clear that after another period of repressive action progress may be reduced and indeed reversed. Although the present momentum might conceivably continue to carry the effort forward even if Diem remains in power and political tensions continue, any significant slowing in the 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 time period there would not be a serious material effect. Even within this period, however, the flow of piastres to support the defense budget will gradually begin to decline and the GVN will be forced to draw down its foreign exchange reserves or curtail its military expenditures.

Within the domestic economy the existing large pipelines would mean that there would be no material reason for inflation to begin in the short term period. However, the psychological effect of growing realization that the CIP program has been suspended might be substantial in 2-4 months. Saigon has a large number of speculative traders, and although there is

considerable police effort to control prices, this might not be able to contain a general trend of speculation and hoarding. Once inflation did develop, it could have a serious effect on the GVN budget and the conduct of the war.

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

C. Paramilitary and Other Assistance.

- (1) USOM assistance to the Combat Police and USOM and USIS assistance to the Director General of Information and the ARVN PsyWar Program could be suspended. These projects involve a relatively small amount of local currency but their suspension, particularly in the case of USIS, might adversely affect programs which the U.S. wishes to see progress.
- (2)

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

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

At the same time, support should continue, but through General Harkins rather than CIA, for border surveillance and other similar field

operations that are contributing to the war effort.

We have weighed this cut-off action carefully. It runs a risk that Colonel Tung would refuse to carry out external operations against the Lao corridor and North Vietnam. It might also limit CIA's access to the military. However, U.S. liaison with high military officers could probably be fully maintained through the U.S. military advisors. On balance, we conclude that these possible disadvantages are outweighed by the gains implicit in this action.

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

D. Propaganda.

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

E. The Leverage of Conditioning Our Military Aid on Satisfactory Progress.

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

F. Conclusions.

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

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

VIII. COUP POSSIBILITIES

A. Prospects of a Spontaneous Coup.

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

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

Diem/Nhu are keenly aware of the capability of the generals to take over the country, utilizing the tremendous power now vested in the military

forces. They, therefore, concentrate their manipulative talent on the general officers, by transfers, and by controls over key units and their locations. They are aware that these actions may reduce efficiency, but they tolerate it rather than risk the prospect that they be overthrown and their social revolution frustrated. They have established a praetorian guard to guarantee considerable bloodshed if any attack is made. The generals have seen slim hope of surmounting these difficulties without prohibitive risk to themselves, the unity of the Army and the Establishment itself.

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

B. Prospects for Improvement under an Alternative Government.

The prospects that a replacement regime would be an improvement appear to be about 50-50.⁴ Initially, only a strongly authoritarian regime would be able to pull the government together and maintain order. In view of the pre-eminent role of the military in Vietnam today, it is probable that this role would be filled by a military officer, perhaps taking power after the selective process of a junta dispute. Such an authoritarian military regime, perhaps after an initial period of euphoria at the departure of Diem/Nhu, would be apt to entail a resumption of the repression at least of Diem, the corruption of the Vietnamese Establishment before Diem, and an emphasis on conventional military rather than social, economic and political considerations, with at least an equivalent degree of xenophobic nationalism.

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

C. Possible U.S. Actions.

Obviously, clear and explicit U.S. support could make a great difference to the chances of a coup. However, at the present time we lack a clear picture of what acceptable individuals might be brought to the point of

action, or what kind of government might emerge. We therefore need an intensive clandestine effort, under the Ambassador's direction, to establish necessary contacts to allow the U.S. to continuously appraise coup prospects.

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

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

IX. ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVE POLICIES

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

1. Return to avowed support of the Diem regime and attempt to obtain the necessary improvements through persuasion from a posture of "reconciliation." This would not mean any expression of approval of the repressive actions of the regime, but simply that we would go back in practice to business as usual.
2. Follow a policy of selective pressures: "purely correct" relationships at the top official level, continuing to withhold further actions in the commodity import program, and making clear our disapproval of the regime. A further element in this policy is letting the present impression stand that the U.S. would not be averse to a change of Government—although we would not take any immediate actions to initiate a coup.
3. Start immediately to promote a coup by high ranking military officers. This policy might involve more extended suspensions of aid and sharp denunciations of the regime's actions so timed as to fit with coup prospects and planning.

Our analysis of these alternatives is as follows:

1.

Reconciliation.

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

2.

Selective Pressures.

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

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

At the same time, there are various factors that set a time limit to pursuing this course of action in its present form. Within 2-4 months we have to make critical decisions with the GVN about its 1964 budget and our economic support level. In addition, there is a significant and

growing possibility that even the present limited actions in the economic field—more for psychological than for economic reasons—would start a wave of speculation and inflation that would be difficult to control or bring back into proper shape. As to when we would reverse our present course, the resumption of the full program of economic and military aid should be tied to the actions of the Diem government.

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

3. Organizing a Coup.

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

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

*Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
Secretary of Defense*⁵

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Top Secret. Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, pp. 554-573.

² Document 142.

³ 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. [Footnote in the source text.]

⁴ Mr. Sullivan (State) believes that a replacement regime which does not suffer from the overriding danger of Nhu's ambition to establish a totalitarian state (the control of which he might easily lose to the Communists in the course of his flirtations) would be inevitably better than the current regime even if the former did have the deficiencies described. [Footnote in the source text.]

⁵ The source text bears no signatures.

168. Memorandum of Conversation¹

New York, October 2, 1963, 3 p.m.

SecDel/MC/69

SUBJECT

South Vietnam; Internal

PARTICIPANTS

United States

The Secretary
Ambassador Yost
Mr. Thatcher (Reporter)

South Vietnam

Ambassador Buu Hoia

The Secretary started the conversation by noting that in order to achieve the goal of security and independence for the Republic of Vietnam, it would be necessary first to defeat the Viet-Cong. US policy on this matter is as clear as is our commitment to the goal. As Ambassador Buu Hoia well knew, we have been seriously concerned about our ability to achieve this goal because of what appeared to be a shattering of solidarity in South Vietnam, a loss of confidence by the people in their government. As Mao Tse-Tung had once observed, if the people are in support of the guerillas, every bush becomes an ally. Until recently we were confident that the bushes in South Vietnam were our allies, but we were no longer sure. He expected shortly to receive Mr. McNamara's report,² but had not as yet seen it.

Amb. Buu Hoia said that he did not deny much of what had been said, but he felt that things were not necessarily what they appeared to be, and that the full scope of the struggle had to be kept in mind. The present fight is not a fight of today's battles, or even a year-to-year struggle; rather, the fight spans the time of a generation. To win we must encourage followers of the Viet-Cong to switch over to our side. At the same time we must prevent any drain from our side either by those who defect to the Viet-Cong or by those who might simply leave the country. He felt that no government has had worse public relations than his, a fact which he believed stems from their past reliance on foreigners for public relations.

Addressing himself to the immediate situation, Buu Hoia said that "Nhu is indispensable, and yet Madame Nhu must clearly be eliminated".

He digressed to review recent events which originated in the city of Hue, center of the Buddhist faith in South Vietnam, yet a city which at the same time retains its traditional role as "a hotbed of revolt".

Stating that he was convinced that these were the facts, Buu Hoia said that an approach had been made to His Holiness Pope John suggesting that President Diem's brother, Archbishop Thuc, be named Archbishop in Saigon. Pope John had recognized the political overtones of this request and had settled on the city of Hue as a compromise. This was how the President's brother became named as Archbishop in Hue, not long ago.

But the President had another brother, Can, who also lived in Hue, was a militant nationalist with a very poor press reputation. Can was a sincere friend of Buddhists in Hue and was, in fact, the source through whom funds were passed by the government to the Buddhist hierarchy in Hue. And when his elder brother, Archbishop Thuc arrived in Hue, local officials deserted Can in favor of the elder brother who appeared to be closer to the President. This led to a feeling of despair and hopelessness on the part of Buddhists in that city. The demonstrations which erupted in Hue in early May were triggered by orders from Saigon that the Buddhist flag should be pulled down; Can had earlier assured the Buddhists that they should fly their flag and that he would take responsibility for keeping their flag up.

Buu Hoia noted that it was President Diem, not Mr. Nhu, who ordered the Buddhist flag pulled down in Hue.

He said that Nhu had put the all-important ideological content into the fight with his strategic hamlet program. He, Buu Hoia, regretted to state that he is convinced that the "top of the government is rotten" and that the strategic hamlet program is an absolutely necessary counterpart to this rottenness. For these reasons he was convinced that Mr. Nhu is an indispensable figure for the successful conduct of the overall struggle.

The Secretary asked if it could be demonstrated that Mr. Nhu is not an all-controlling influence in the government.

Buu Hoia said that the US should urge Diem to appoint Nhu to the specific job of running the strategic hamlet program. Posing the question of whom this would leave to run the government, Buu Hoia said such a

man would be Thuan, who he felt was already the equivalent of a Prime Minister. He noted that Thuan is purely an administrator, neither corrupt nor ambitious, and not interested in politics.

Governor Stevenson asked if what Ambassador Buu Hoia had described suggested the need for a change in Hue. Buu Hoia said that he believed that the present Pope would be willing to make a change.

He recalled that he had earlier said that Madame Nhu must go. He felt that President Diem was still convinced that she is not harmful, and he felt that the President needs to be told just how harmful she is. He said that he and others have been doing their best to prevent her from coming here, and he remarked that Vice President Johnson's letter to Madame Nhu might be helpful if shown to President Diem.

The Secretary said his impression remained that both Mr. and Mrs. Nhu exerted a harmful influence. The Secretary believed it was still necessary for the government to build solidarity. He agreed that Mr. Nhu had made an important contribution in the strategic hamlet program. But he felt that it would be hard to get anything done in the government if fear and suspicion pervades its top level.

Buu Hoia regretted that he had to say much of the harm was done by the President himself, often the President made harmful decisions despite his brother's (Nhu) advice to the contrary. He cited in this instance the order to pull the flags down in Hue (with the implication that Nhu had not favored this order). Buu Hoia felt that Mr. Nhu had only recently emerged from his previous "backroom" role into the public eye. He thought this might have resulted from Madame Nhu's influence.

In general terms, Buu Hoia felt it absolutely necessary to convince the President that he must set up a cabinet in which each member would stand or fall purely on the basis of performance. In this scheme of things, Mr. Nhu should be given the task of running the strategic hamlet program, and should at the same time again resume his role as a "backroom" advisor.

The Secretary wondered if it would be important to remove Nhu from the palace and to make his wife cease her palace operations.

Buu Hoia did not believe this would be a problem; it might not even be necessary for the Nhus to remove themselves from Saigon, but he agreed that they should be removed from the palace itself.

The conversation then fumed to the immediate situation at the UN which has been reported separately by telegram, Secto 51 to the Department.³

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by Peter S. Thacher of the Political Affairs Section of the Mission. The meeting took place at USUN.

² Document 167.

³ In Secto 51, October 2, USUN reported that Buu Hoia was about to raise with U Thant the idea of an ad hoc mission of leading international personalities to examine the Buddhist problem in South Vietnam. To dispel suspicion that this might be a stalling device, Buu Hoia would assure U Thant that the Government of Vietnam did not oppose reopening the issue later in the General Assembly session. In response to a question from Rusk, Buu Hoia said that mission members would be free to investigate the problem in South Vietnam as they chose. Buu Hoia stated that he and his government felt this way because there was no longer a Buddhist problem in South Vietnam. (Department of State, Central Files, SOC 14-1 S VIET-US)

169. Summary Record of the 519th Meeting of the National Security Council¹

Washington, October 2, 1963, 6 p.m.

[Here follows an attendance list.]

The President opened the meeting by summarizing where we now stand on U.S. policy toward Vietnam. Most of the officials involved are in agreement. We are not papering over our differences. We are agreed to try to find effective means of changing the political atmosphere in Saigon. We are agreed that we should not cut off all U.S. aid to Vietnam, but are agreed on the necessity of trying to improve the situation in Vietnam by bringing about changes there. Reports of disagreements do not help the war effort in Vietnam and do no good to the government as a whole. We must all sign on and with good heart set out to implement the actions decided upon. Here and in Saigon we must get ahead by carrying out the agreed policy. Because we are agreed, we should convey our agreement to our subordinates. There are no differences between Washington and Ambassador Lodge or among the State and Defense Departments and the CIA. Ambassador Lodge has full authority to pull into line all U.S. government representatives in Saigon.

The President then turned to consideration of the draft public statement (copy attached).² He said that attacks on the Diem regime in public statements are less effective than actions which we plan to take. He preferred to base our policy on the harm which Diem's political actions are causing to the effort against the Viet Cong rather than on our moral opposition to the kind of government Diem is running.

Mr. Ball said that he and Secretary Rusk felt that there should be stress on the moral issues involved because of the beneficial effect which such emphasis produced in world public opinion, especially among UN delegates. The President replied that the major problem was with U.S. public opinion and he believed we should stress the harm Diem's policies are doing to the war effort against the Communists.

Mr. Bundy said Secretary McNamara and General Taylor wanted to emphasize the objective of winning the war. State Department officials wanted something more than an objective of merely winning the war.

Mr. Harriman commented that he was prepared to accept the language as proposed.

The President objected to the phrase "by the end of this year" in the sentence "The U.S. program for training Vietnamese should have progressed to the point where 1000 U.S. military personnel assigned to South Vietnam could be withdrawn." He believed that if we were not able to take this action by the end of this year, we would be accused of being over optimistic.

Secretary McNamara said he saw great value in this sentence in order to meet the view of Senator Fulbright and others that we are bogged down forever in Vietnam. He said the sentence reveals that we have a withdrawal plan. Furthermore, it commits us to emphasize the training of Vietnamese, which is something we must do in order to replace U.S. personnel with Vietnamese.

The draft announcement was changed to make both of the time predictions included in paragraph 3 a part of the McNamara-Taylor report³ rather than as predictions of the President.

Mr. Bundy raised the question as to Ambassador Lodge's view of the proposed draft policy statement. He said Ambassador Lodge could be told that because of the time pressure it had not been possible to clear the statement with him, but that it was felt here it would meet his requirements.

The President then asked about the measures which we would take to bring pressure on Diem. Secretary McNamara replied that a working group would propose recommendations for the President's decision at a later date.

The President directed that no one discuss with the press any measures which he may decide to undertake on the basis of the recommendations to be made to him. He said we should not talk about such measures until they are agreed. The selected cuts in U.S. assistance should be discussed only in the Cabinet Room until all of them were finally agreed upon.

Mr. Salinger said he would decline to answer any press questions about what measures the U.S. proposed to take.

In response to a question by Administrator Bell, the President said he should reply to inquiring Congressmen that we are continuing our present aid schedule. After a further exchange, the President made clear that what he thought we should tell the Congressmen should be limited to saying that aid which we are now extending would be continued. He recognized that aid we are now extending is not that we had been extending prior to the August disturbances.

Secretary McNamara felt that Mr. Bell should say nothing. The group would return to the President by Friday⁴ with specific recommendations.

The President then asked what we should say about the news story attacking CIA which appeared in today's Washington Daily News. He read a draft paragraph for inclusion in the public statement but rejected it as being too fluffy. He felt no one would believe a statement saying that there were no differences of view among the various U.S agencies represented in Saigon. He thought that we should say that now we had a positive policy endorsed by the National Security Council and that such policy would be carried out by all concerned.

Mr. Bundy suggested the President direct everyone present not to discuss the paper. Now that a policy decision had been made, we should be absolutely certain that no one continues to talk to the press about differences among U.S agencies.

The President said that as of tonight we have a policy and a report endorsed by all the members of the National Security Council.

The President asked again about the means we plan to use in changing the political atmosphere in Saigon.

Secretary McNamara discussed the recommendations in paragraph 4 of the report and said the group would be returning to the President with specific actions to be taken.

After the President left the meeting, there was a discussion as to how to put into final form the recommendations for the President. It was decided that a sub-group would make more precise the recommendations contained in paragraph 4, and that the group of principals would meet the following day in the absence of the President in order to prepare a paper for him to consider on Friday.⁵

The only substantive point that came out in this discussion was Secretary McNamara's belief that economic pressures against Diem should be undertaken over a longer period of time rather than a short period which would produce critical reactions in Saigon.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, NSC Meeting No. 519. Top Secret. This meeting took place in the Cabinet Room of the White House and lasted until 6:30 p.m., according to the President's Log. (*Ibid.*)

² Not attached, but see [Document 170](#).

³ Document 167.

⁴ October 4.

⁵ See [footnote 3. Document 174](#).

170. Record of Action No. 2472, Taken at the 519th Meeting of the National Security Council¹

Washington, October 2, 1963.

McNAMARA-TAYLOR REPORT ON VIETNAM²

- a. Endorsed the basic presentation on Vietnam made by Secretary McNamara and General Taylor.
- b. Noted the President's approval of the following statement of U.S. policy which was later released to the press:³

"1. The security of South Viet Nam is a major interest of the United States as other free nations. We will adhere to our policy of working with the people and Government of South Viet Nam to deny this country to Communism and to suppress the externally stimulated and supported insurgency of the Viet Cong as promptly as possible. Effective performance in this undertaking is the central objective of our policy in South Viet Nam.

"2. The military program in South Viet Nam has made progress and is sound in principle, though improvements are being energetically sought.

"3. Major U.S. assistance in support of this military effort is needed only until the insurgency has been suppressed or until the national security forces of the Government of South Viet Nam are capable of suppressing it.

"Secretary McNamara and General Taylor reported their judgment that the major part of the U.S. military task can be completed by the end of 1965, although there may be a continuing requirement for a limited number of U.S. training personnel. They reported that by the end of this year, the U.S. program for training Vietnamese should have progressed to the point where 1,000 U.S. military personnel assigned to South Viet Nam can be withdrawn.

"4. The political situation in South Viet Nam remains deeply serious. The United States has made clear its continuing opposition to any repressive actions in South Viet Nam. While such actions have not yet significantly affected the military effort, they could do so in the future.

“5. It remains the policy of the United States, in South Viet Nam as in other parts of the world, to support the efforts of the people of that country to defeat aggression and to build a peaceful and free society.”

¹ Source: Department of State, S/S-NSC Files: Lot 70 D 265, NSC Meetings. Secret.

² Document 167.

³ Printed in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy*, 1963, pp. 759-760. McGeorge Bundy sent Lodge the following telegram explaining this statement:

“Statement issued after NSC meeting today represents President's own judgment of common purpose and policy established by you and McNamara mission and is designed to strengthen your hand in next phase.

“Urgency of immediate public proof of unity here prevented prior reference to you but President asked me to insure that if you need any adjustment or modification you let us know.” (CAP 63556, October 3; Kennedy Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables)

Lodge responded in telegram 624 from Saigon: “The statement is excellent in substance and well-tempered in tone. I am proud to be associated with it.” (*Ibid.*)

171. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, October 3, 1963.

1385. 1. On 2 Oct 1963 Lt Col Conein accidentally encountered Maj Gen Tran Van Don at Tan Son Nhut Airport. Don stated he had been attempting to make contact with Conein for some time. Requested that Conein come to Nha Trang on night of 2 Oct for private discussion. Conein was noncommittal in his reply.

2. Col Conein's visiting Nha Trang to talk with Don was approved by Trueheart.

3. Trueheart's guidance to Conein was that he neither to encourage nor discourage any coup thinking or action, to elicit information only and not to commit the USG to any action whatsoever.

4. Conein met with Don in Nha Trang on night of 2 Oct for approximately one hour. No other persons were present during the meeting. Don made the following points:

- a. Duong Van Minh desires to see Conein for private conversation.
- b. Meeting with Minh will take place 0800 hours 5 Oct at Joint General Staff Headquarters, Saigon.
- c. At that hour Conein is to present himself in uniform at Don's office. Cover topic of conversation will be possible relocation of United States Special forces headquarters. (Comment: This is a cover topic only suggested by Gen Don. CAS Saigon would not undertake discussion such a matter since this would be solely within MACV prerogatives.)
- d. Conein will speak to Minh alone.
- e. Gen Ton That Dinh has realized he was "played for a fool" during his tenure as Military Governor of Saigon. For this reason "may join our side."
- f. Gen Tran Van Kim and Gen Phan Xuan Chieu have been given staff positions under Gen Don on the JGS.
- g. The Generals (specific personalities not identified) have requested President Diem to accord them positions of Minister of Defense, Minister of Interior, Minister of Education, Minister of Civic Action, and the Prefector of the Police for Saigon/Cholon. In addition,

Generals asked President Diem to appoint a general officer Military Governor Saigon/Cholon to insure defense of area. Generals are convinced Diem has no intention of making these appointments.

5. Conein attempted to elicit additional details from Don who refused all attempts at elicitation with statement "you must talk to Minh." Don did volunteer, however, that Generals "now have a plan." Don was emphatic with respect to this last statement.

6. Don also stated that two days prior to Gen Dinh's first press conference (29 Aug) Vietnamese civilian otherwise unidentified visited Ngo Dinh Nhu, stated that Americans were contacting various Vietnamese in order to encourage a coup. Thereupon Nhu had called in Don and Don was shown list of Americans engaged in such coup plots. Don stated Conein's name was not on this list.

7. Ambassador has approved Conein's contact with Don and Minh on 5 October.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is the copy sent by the CIA to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. The telegram was also sent exclusive to the White House for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. It was received at the Department of State at 2:06 p.m. on October 3 and passed to USUN for Rusk eyes only.

172. Memorandum of Meeting¹

Washington, October 3, 1963, 6 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

PRESENT

Secretary McNamara, Secretary Dillon, Under Secretary Ball, Director McCone, Administrator Bell, Acting Director Wilson, Under Secretary Harriman, General Krulak, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric, Assistant Secretary Hilsman, Deputy Assistant Secretary William Bundy, Mr. Janow (AID), Mr. McGeorge Bundy, General Clifton, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Bromley Smith

The group working on Vietnam met without the President to work on the recommendations growing out of the McNamara/Taylor trip to Vietnam.

Secretary McNamara said we cannot stay in the middle much longer. The program outlined in his report² will push us toward a reconciliation with Diem or toward a coup to overthrow Diem. The program will have no major effect on the war effort for a period of from two to four months. Ambassador Lodge, on the basis of conversations in Saigon, would undoubtedly welcome this program as well as instructions to implement it. The question still remains, however, as to what Lodge's bargaining position is. What should Lodge ask Diem to do? We should draw up a list for Lodge and have him find out how many of our recommendations Diem would accept. This list would include the military recommendations contained in the report. As to political actions, there are several things we want Diem to do which we think would halt the erosion of public support of the government, and, hence, the resulting effect on the war effort in Vietnam. One of the important actions would be to reopen Saigon University after conversations with the school authorities. The purpose would be to reassure the students that they need not fear arrest. In return, they would not carry out further riots in Saigon.

Mr. Ball said that if we go down this road it will become known that we are using our aid as pressure on Diem. What position will we be in if we cut off aid, Diem does not do what we want him to do, and then we face a decision to resume aid because, if we do not, the effort against the Viet Cong will cease?

Secretary McNamara believed that Diem would respond to our pressure by moving part way toward a position which will improve the political situation in Vietnam and therefore improve the military effort.

The group agreed that Administrator Bell of AID should tell Congress that we are not suspending aid but were putting Diem on a shorter leash which would mean that we have greater flexibility to deal with the developing situation in Vietnam.

Bromley Smith³

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Meetings and Memoranda, vol. 11, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. Also published in Declassified Documents, 1982, 510C. The source text indicates the President did not attend the meeting, which was held in the White House Situation Room.

² Document 167.

³ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

173. Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' Special Assistant (Sullivan) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)¹

Washington, October 3, 1963.

The ultimate objectives of the United States in Viet Nam do not coincide with the Diem-Nhu objectives. We wish to defeat Viet Cong subversion so that South Viet Nam may develop as a free state. They wish to defeat Viet Cong subversion so that Viet Nam can develop as a totalitarian state, which, in Nhu's words, will "challenge the communists on their own grounds using their own methods". I believe such an effort will fail and will result in a communist victory in South Vietnam.

The question is not, therefore, whether we can win with this regime but rather whether we want this regime to have the benefits of such a victory for purposes which are contrary not only to our objectives but also to our interests. The fact is that Nhu is exploiting two principal elements of power to produce his totalitarian state. The first is the Vietnamese Establishment—that educated, propertied, leadership class which makes up the military officer class, the bureaucracy and the Vietnamese portion of the business community—the second is the military power of the United States.

Nhu will disestablish the first element by liquidation when he feels he has achieved enough success in the fight against the Viet Cong and the establishment of a peasant power base. He will eject the second by a deal with North Vietnam when he feels he has adequate means to continue in power without its assistance.

At the current moment, therefore, our situation equates with the thoroughly discontented Establishment, and their ultimate goals more closely coincide with ours than do those of the Diem-Nhu regime. I conclude therefore that it is in our interest to make common cause with them to overthrow the current regime.

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Vietnam—Policy. Secret.

174. Memorandum for the Record of a Meeting of the Executive Committee¹

Washington, October 4, 1963, 4 p.m.

1. The purpose of the meeting was to examine a second effort on the part of the drafting group to cover the economic and political actions recommended in the McNamara-Taylor trip report;² specifically, to add detailed requirements which should be communicated to Diem and which, if fulfilled, would provide the basis for resumption of full support by the U.S. Government.
- 2.

The attached paper³ was submitted by the drafters. There were no major criticisms. Those voiced were:

- a. The supporting analysts,⁴ which appeared in the preceding paper, was desirable and should be integrated into the current draft.
- b. It should be made clear that the instructions involved had their origin with the President.
- c. The theme should be molded into the paper that the dialogue between the Ambassador and President Diem is designed to achieve three things—an increase in the military effort, a reduction in the strains on U.S./GVN confidence, and increase of popular Vietnamese support for winning the war.

Based on the foregoing, minor editorial changes were suggested.

3. The principal discussion centered around how the Ambassador was to convey to Diem the U.S. purposes, how the matter was to be explained to the U.S. public and what effect the suspension of aid would actually have.
4. It was the Attorney General's view that we are so deeply committed to the support of the effort in Vietnam that Diem will not be greatly influenced by the steps contemplated in this program. He was likewise concerned with the proposed technique of making the aid suspension known to Diem by indirection, rather than by direct confrontation. He also raised the question of the logic of making known the plan to withdraw U.S. soldiers. Mr. McNamara rationalized this course of action to him in terms of there being no wisdom in leaving our forces

in Vietnam, when their presence is no longer required, either by virtue of the Vietnamese having been trained to assume the function, or the function having been fulfilled.

5. Mr. Bell was against use of the word "suspend" in discussion of aid and preferred to use the term "held up" to indicate that it might be resumed. He also proposed, in the anticipation that the President would have to make some form of public statement, that it should be pivoted upon the theme that the programs which are held up are being reviewed to insure that they are consistent with the President's previously announced policy regarding assistance for Vietnam.
6. There was discussion of the desirability of increasing VOA broadcasts, particularly with respect to the emphasis on democracy, freedom and enlightened processes. It was Mr. McNamara's view that we should be wary of this action because it might inspire Diem to eject the USIS, which would be disastrous.

Mr. McNamara recommended that at tomorrow's White House meeting the Conclusions and Recommendations in the McNamara-Taylor report be reviewed in the presence of the President, along with the analysis of alternative policies (Section IX). At that meeting, also, there will be a further redraft of the paper on economics and politics, embodying the minor changes suggested today.

V.H. Krulak
Major General, USMC

¹ Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-233-69. Top Secret; Sensitive. Drafted by Krulak who did not provide a list of participants. The meeting was held at the White House. A record of the discussion by Bromley Smith lists the following participants: "Secretary McNamara, Secretary Dillon, Attorney General, Under Secretary Harriman, Deputy Secretary Gilpatric (later), Administrator Bell, Director McCone, Acting Director Wilson, General Krulak, Assistant Secretary Hilsman, Deputy Assistant Secretary William Bundy, Mr. Janow (AID), Mr. Koren (Hilsman's office), Mr. McGeorge Bundy, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Bromley Smith." (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda, Meetings on Vietnam)

² Document 167.

³ Reference is to an October 4 draft of a Report for the Executive Committee of the NSC. There is no drafting information on it, but Krulak implies that it was a group effort. The October 4 draft was revised as Krulak describes above and then discussed at a meeting with the President on October 5; see [Document 179](#). The paper was then sent as a cable to Saigon; see [Document 181](#).

The October 4 draft is in the Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series, Vietnam, and the revised October 5 draft is *ibid.*, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda, Meetings on Vietnam.

⁴ Document 175.

175. Annex to the Draft Report Prepared for the Executive Committee of the National Security Council¹

Washington, October 4, 1963.

SUPPORTING ANALYSIS

Introduction: The recommended US actions are designed to indicate to the Diem Government our displeasure at its political actions and to create significant uncertainty in that government and in key Vietnamese groups as to the future intentions of the US. At the same time, the actions are designed to have at most slight impact on the military or counterinsurgency effort against the Viet Cong, at least in the short term. The analysis of each action from this standpoint is as follows:

1.

AID Commodity Import Program. Present planning envisages a range of \$80-95 million of AID commodity imports, funded under the FY 1964 Supporting Assistance portion of the foreign aid appropriation and applicable to the CY 1964 budgetary and commodity needs of the GVN. An allotment of \$28 million for the first quarter of FY 1964 has already been made, and \$13 million of this committed and expended, with the balance of \$5 million allotted but frozen in Saigon. A second quarter allotment of \$20-25 million would now normally be due. The recommendation would continue to freeze the present \$5 million and would withhold the second quarter allotment.

The material effect of this action must be considered from two standpoints:

- a. Commodity imports are handled through commercial channels and the proceeds in piastres then become available to the GVN, 15% at the time of licensing, approximately 80% three months later at the time of shipment, and the balance through tax receipts upon arrival. The shortfall in piastre flow from receipts at the time of licensing is sufficiently small to be within the normal swing of the account, and would have no serious effect on piastre availability for the GVN budget, the deficiency being met by small borrowings from the Central Bank. However, the effect on piastre availability would

become substantial in 3-4 months, in amounts that could be met over an additional short period by larger scale borrowings but that would be cumulatively serious in producing a budget pinch in the early months of 1964, and might cause the GVN to cut expenses even sooner. It should be noted that the GVN budget for 1964 is already tight even on the assumption that \$95 million of AID commodity imports would be available, and it is now uncertain whether the foreign aid final appropriation would permit the \$95 million level.

- b. The effect on the flow of commodities into Vietnam would not be serious in the short term, inasmuch as \$70-80 million of previous US-funded commodity imports as well as substantial private imports are in the pipeline. A valley would, however, begin to appear about March 1964.

Psychologically, a major problem might arise as the mere decision to suspend becomes more fully known in Saigon official and business circles. The freezing of the \$5 million is already known, and the timing pattern of allotment decisions is also familiar. Hence, it must be expected that this too would become rapidly known. The resulting uncertainty might cause a substantial wave of speculation or hoarding. Moreover, retaliatory or compensatory action by the GVN might accelerate the process. Our tentative judgment is that inflation would start to become a substantial danger in 2-4 months, but the situation would require the closest possible scrutiny. We should be prepared to live with a modest degree of inflation, but anything major would be cause for concern. It should be noted, however, that the inflationary effect would probably be felt principally in the affected commodities and not, for example, in the basic price of rice for the people, which is under tight GVN control. Inflation would hit Saigon initially, and would be slow to reach the countryside. Its greatest early impact on the military effort would be through raising the already tight GVN budget to levels even more unlikely to be attained by any measure the GVN could be induced or pressured to take. Since 1/2 the GVN budget goes to the military effort, shortfalls might be reflected in some measure of force reductions and probably in reductions in the GVN's contribution to such key elements as the strategic hamlet program.

This action is not readily reversible. Since commodity imports move through commercial channels, they could not be later speeded up to avoid the impending valley. Nonetheless, a firm later decision to resume either at present full planning rates or at a more austere rate

designed to keep some pressure on the GVN would tend to reduce the adverse effects.

Within 2-4 months, and perhaps sooner, a decision would have to be made whether to continue suspension and incur substantial effects on the military effort, or to resume either at the full level or at an intermediate austere level.

2.

PL 480 items. Although the PL 480 mechanics are the same as for AID commodity imports, it should be noted that the specific items are in some cases more sensitive from the standpoint of popular blame to the U.S. in the countryside. Moreover, from the U.S. budgetary standpoint, PL 480 funds are more readily available than AID funds and for this reason have been built up to the maximum consistent with the GVN capacity to absorb; withholding PL 480 items must be weighed carefully if the economic effect is such as to require additional input in AID funds at a later time.

The only presently pending PL 480 item is \$2.9 million of condensed milk. Much of this goes to the countryside, and its cut-off would be felt widely and might be blamed directly on the U.S. For this reason we do not recommend suspension of this item, nor, for lack of an appropriate mechanism, do we believe it should be shifted to direct grant channels under Title II. Instead, we believe it can make a modest contribution to the desired picture of uncertainty of being placed on a month-by-month basis rather than being negotiated on the normal basis of an agreement covering several months.

The next items requiring decision will be wheat flour (\$6 million) and raw cotton (\$12 million) both of which would start to run short unless supplementary agreements were negotiated about 1 November. We reserve a recommendation on these.

The remaining items comprise \$5 million in the total PL 480 planning figure of \$33 million for FY 1964. These too require no immediate decision.

Actions in the PL 480 field are similar to actions affecting AID commodity imports in their reversibility. Impending commodity slacks cannot be taken up by accelerated action.

3.

AID Project Loans. The Saigon waterworks and electric power projects are now partially funded and under construction, and the remaining balances are up for final approval. Arrangements are so nearly final that it would be necessary to inform the contractors in both cases, and we believe this should be done frankly at once.

Suspension of these projects would have no direct effect whatever on the military effort. However, it could add to the psychological factors bearing on the likelihood of inflation, and would eventually affect employment in the Saigon area.

The GVN might well react to our suspension either by applying its own resources to the projects (raising a cumulative foreign exchange problem) or by turning to third countries such as France. The latter would be an interesting test of the recently displayed French attitude of willingness to assist, but the amounts are not so great that we should be unduly concerned from this standpoint if the French would come through.

4.

Support for Colonel Tung's Saigon Forces.

The stated rationale for this action is that we will not support forces not being used for combat purposes. The material effect of this gesture would not be great, since the equipment already in the hands of these units is generally adequate and the U.S. contribution to their pay is small and could be made up from the GVN budget. However, the gesture would have importance not merely as part of the picture of uncertainty, but perhaps even more strongly in dissociating the U.S. from support of these forces. If-as we believe likely-Diem refused to accept our conditions, or proposed some transparent device, we should then (unlike the other actions) make an outright public announcement. The U.S. press reaction would undoubtedly be most favorable, and within Soviet Vietnam both high military leaders and disaffected elements in Saigon would also be favorable.

The cut-off action against Colonel Tung would be designed to be permanent and not reversible, unless our conditions were met and maintained.

The recommended transfer [less than 1 line not declassified] to MACV of border surveillance and mountain scout forces is desirable in its own right. Funding through FY 1964 will continue to be supplied [*less than 1 line not declassified*] under the same procedures now used for CIDG forces.

Furthermore, MACV [less than 1 line not declassified] should urgently consider whether it is wise and feasible to transfer to MACV wholly or in part certain [less than 1 line not declassified] activities: combat intelligence teams and operations into south Laos and North Vietnam.

Such recommended or possible transfers [less than 1 line not declassified] responsibility would result in the loss of some [less than 1 line not declassified] liaison connections in high military circles. Hopefully, this slack could be taken up by U.S. military advisors.

5. *Over-all Impact.* As stated in the McNamara-Taylor Report, it should be emphasized that, so long as the U.S. continued its principal assistance activities that contribute directly to the military effort, the level of pressure on Diem generated by the recommended actions would probably not be high. We do believe, however, that they would collectively add up to a picture of significant uncertainty, and that this would extend to Diem both directly and through representations by military leaders and economic officials who would be aware of the potential consequences. We must recognize that pressures such as these do not appear likely to get rid of Nhu, and likewise that they might conceivably lead Diem and Nhu to some upsetting action.
6. *Need for a Working Group.* Both GVN reaction and the impact of these actions on the military effort (notably through the inflation possibility) require very close review. Hence our recommendation for a working group in Washington, with Ambassador Lodge reporting reactions carefully.

CAVEATS TO RECOMMENDED APPROACH

It is only prudent to recognize that the course of action outlined above can be substantially affected by developments beyond our control. Among these might be one or more of the following:

- a) Unanticipated coup d'etat (e.g. by junior officers), or death of Diem.
- b) Other unanticipated internal developments (similar to the Hue incident on May 8) which could take place in the volatile atmosphere that

characterizes the Vietnamese political scene. This could include a marked step-up in the pace and nature of the Viet Cong effort.

- c) International developments affecting the war or the GVN's position, e.g. active Chinese Communist or Cambodian support to the Viet Cong; a UN initiative toward the condemnation of the GVN or neutralization of the area; or active and direct intervention by North Vietnamese forces in Central Viet-Nam.
- d) A posture by the GVN vis-a-vis the United States characterized by outright and stubborn hostility to "foreign interference," accompanied by efforts to rally popular xenophobia.
- e) A bid by Hanoi or the National Front for a rapprochement on terms attractive to Diem and Nhu (a contingency we believe conceivable, but unlikely).
- f) A situation in which the Ngos carry out the forms of change, but maintain the fundamental character and image of their regime.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam. Top Secret. There is no drafting information on the source text, but an earlier draft of this annex, October 3, had William Bundy as the drafter. (*Ibid.*) This annex was attached without modification to the October 5 draft of the report (see [footnote 3, Document 174](#)) but was not sent as part of [Document 181](#).

176. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, October 4, 1963—9:03 p.m.

529. Eyes only for Ambassador from Acting Secretary. Halberstam story in Times today says you “would be happier with a new CIA Chief” and recounts in some detail alleged State-CIA disagreements Saigon. Says “Lodge has told Washington he wants a new chief² and CIA is fighting back hard present struggle is believed to have parallel in struggle by Lodge against Maj. Gen. Harkins ”, etc.³ (See Oct. 4 Wireless File.)

As you can appreciate, this story has caused concern in Washington, since we have been making serious effort in conjunction with McNamara-Taylor mission to achieve actual and visible unity within USG. I am aware, of course, that Saigon is a rumor-mill and that gossip of this kind is most difficult to control. We shall, however, keep you currently informed of press play-back here to assist you in taking whatever measures possible to guard against stateside stories that can harm what we are seeking to achieve.

Would appreciate your advice as to further steps that might be taken either in Saigon or Washington to ensure a more accurate reflection of our common commitment to a single governmental policy which is essential if we are to maintain full public support and understanding.

Ball

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Confidential; Priority. Drafted and initialed by Ball.

² John Richardson was transferred from Vietnam on October 5. President Kennedy referred to the transfer in response to a question at a press conference on October 9 about reports of the CIA acting independently in Vietnam. The President discounted the reports and said he found no evidence that “CIA has done anything but support policy,” and had “operated under close control of the Director of Central Intelligence, operating with the cooperation of the National Security Council and

under my instructions." (Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1963, pp. 768-769)

Taylor, in *Swords and Plowshares*, p. 300, states that "Richardson had become persona non grata to Lodge for reasons I could not assess, but it seemed in the interests of all parties to reassign him elsewhere." In *To Move a Nation*, p. 515, Hilsman offers the view that Richardson's departure was at Lodge's request, but was related more to a signal to the Vietnamese rather than personal animosity or rivalry.

³ Ellipses in the source text.

177. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, October 5, 1963.

[document number not declassified] 1. Lt. Col. Conein met with Gen. Duong Van Minh at Gen. Minh's headquarters on Le Van Duyet for one hour and ten minutes morning of 5 Oct. 1963. This meeting was at the initiative of Gen. Minh and had been specifically cleared in advance by Ambassador Lodge. No other persons were present. The conversation was conducted in French.

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

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

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

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

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

- a. Assassination of Ngo Dinh Nhu and Ngo Dinh Can keeping President Diem in office. Gen. Minh said this was the easiest plan to accomplish.
- b. The encirclement of Saigon by various military units particularly the unit at Ben Cat. (Comment: Fifth division elements commanded by Gen. Dinh.)
- c. Direct confrontation between military units involved in the coup and loyalist military units in Saigon, in effect, dividing the city of Saigon into sectors and cleaning it out pocket by pocket. Gen. Minh claims under the circumstances Diem and Nhu could count on the loyalty of 5,500 troops within the City of Saigon.

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

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

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

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

10. Minh appeared to understand Conein's position of being unable to comment at the present moment but asked that Conein again meet with Gen. Minh to discuss the specific plan of operations which Gen. Minh hopes to put into action. No specific date was given for this next meeting. Conein was again non-committal in his reply. Gen. Minh once again indicated his understanding and stated that he would arrange to

contact Conein in the near future and hoped that Conein would be able to meet with him again and give the assurance outlined above.

¹ Source: Department of State, Har-Van files, Coup South Vietnam. Secret. Also printed in *Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition*, vol. II, pp. 767-768. There is no time of transmission on the source text.

178. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 5, 1963.

Eyes only for Secretary Rusk for [from] Lodge. Please pass to DCI Mr. John McCone. Reference Big Minh-Conein meeting ([*document number not declassified*]).² While neither General Harkins nor I have great faith in Big Minh, we need instructions on his approach. My recommendation, in which General Harkins concurs, is that Conein when next approached by Minh should:

1. Assure him that US will not attempt to thwart his plans.
2. Offer to view his plans, other than assassination plans.
3. Assure Minh that US aid will be continued to Vietnam under government which gives promise of gaining support of people and winning the war against the Communists. Point out that it is our view that this is most likely to be the case if government includes good proportion of well qualified civilian leaders in key positions. (Conein should press Minh for details his thinking re composition future government.)

I suggest the above be discussed with Secretary McNamara and General Taylor who contacted Minh in recent visit.

¹ Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, Coup South Vietnam. Top Secret. Sent via CIA channels as telegram IN 34026. A note on the source text indicates that copies were sent to McGeorge Bundy, Hilsman, and Krulak. Also printed in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, vol. 11, p. 768. No transmission time is given on the source text.

² Document 177.

179. Memorandum for the Files of a Conference With the President¹

Washington, October 5, 1963—9:30 a.m.

SUBJECT

Presidential Conference on South Vietnam

A conference on South Vietnam was held in the Cabinet Room at 9:30 a.m., October 5, 1963. Present were the Vice President, Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, Under Secretary Harriman, General Taylor, Mr. McCone, Administrator Bell, Mr. Bundy and Mr. Forrestal.

The meeting discussed the report of Secretary McNamara and General Taylor and considered draft instructions to Ambassador Lodge.

The President asked what would be the impact of a suspension of the Commodity Import Program. Mr. Bell replied that the Commodity Import Program accounted for approximately 40 percent of South Vietnam's imports. He emphasized that the real effect of a suspension would be an interruption of the flow of commodities into the country. A suspension would not necessarily have an impact upon the government budget. A continued suspension, however, would have a serious effect on the economy.

Mr. McCone said that he believed that the principal effect of a suspension would be to cause an economic crisis in the Saigon business community. This would be more pronounced than the political effects such a suspension might have upon Diem and Nhu.

Secretary McNamara pointed out that since we have already suspended the funding of imports under the program, it would be difficult to resume now.

The President agreed and asked Mr. Bell what would be the impact of a suspension of the two capital projects, the Saigon water works and the Saigon power project.

Mr. Bell replied that a suspension of these projects would not have an effect upon the economy or upon the military effort. But, he pointed out, both projects were already started and near their final stages of

completion. The water project was complete except for the construction of a filtration plant; and the power station needed only a building to house the turbines, which had already been ordered. The President suggested that the contractors in each case simply be told that a decision on the final stages of the two projects would be delayed for policy reasons for an indefinite, but not necessarily long, period of time. Our public posture should be that the two projects were being suspended for further review.

The President noted that the recommendations with respect to the PL 480 program were tantamount to taking no substantive action at this time. In this connection he suggested that, for the present, we say only that we were not in a position to make forward decisions.

The discussion then fumed to recommendations concerning a suspension of assistance to those forces under Colonel Tung which were located in Saigon rather than in the field. The President emphasized that we should make clear the basis upon which we were suspending aid to these forces, i.e. that they were not directly contributing to the war effort and therefore we could not support them.

The President asked Secretary McNamara for his opinion on the nature of the controversy between the Buddhists and the Government. Secretary McNamara replied that in his opinion the controversy was now more political than it was religious.

After a discussion with General Taylor, the President observed that the military improvements which we wished to press upon Diem be taken up as soon as possible by General Harkins rather than by Ambassador Lodge. It would be preferable if discussions of political improvements and possible U.S. pressure actions were undertaken by Ambassador Lodge. The President also said that we should not consider the political recommendations to be in the nature of a hard and fast list of demands, and that this point should be made more clear in the draft instructions.² The most likely and desirable result of any U.S. pressures would be to bring Diem to talk seriously to Lodge about the whole range of issues between us.

The Secretary of State agreed that the military matters should be pressed and that they stood the best chance of being accepted by the GVN. Nevertheless, he felt that we should not forget the importance of obtaining an improvement in the political climate in Saigon.

The President said that no formal or public statement should be made at the conclusion of the meeting. Instead he felt that the Secretaries of State and Defense in executive session before Congressional committees next week should confine themselves to saying that U.S. programs were under continuing review in light of the President's previously announced policy that we supported those things which furthered the war effort and would not support those things which do not.

It was agreed that Section 5 of the McNamara/Taylor Report be approved and that appropriate instructions implementing the recommendation in this section be transmitted via CAS channels. Mr. McCone said that any such activity should be carried on under the tightest security under the direction of the CAS station chief. The President agreed, but added that these activities should be subject to the Ambassador's general guidance.

The President also said that our decision to remove 1,000 U.S. advisors by December of this year should not be raised formally with Diem. Instead the action should be carried out routinely as part of our general posture of withdrawing people when they are no longer needed.

There is attached to this memorandum a copy of the McNamara/ Taylor report and the final telegraphic instructions to Ambassador Lodge.³

M. V. Forrestal

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Forrestal on October 7. The meeting was held in the White House. Forrestal sent this memorandum to Bromley Smith under cover of a memorandum of October 8 which reads in part as follows:

"I also attach a draft NSAM together with a memorandum to Secretary McNamara. If the NSAM looks okay to you, will you shoot it off to McNamara for his clearance?

"Should copies of the NSAM go to anybody else (Secretary Dillon, the Attorney General, the Vice President)? I should think perhaps not."

Smith indicated on the memorandum that he had obtained McNamara's clearance and agreed with Forrestal that no copies should be sent to any one else. The draft NSAM referred to comprised a draft report to the

NSC, October 4 (see [footnote 3, Document 174](#)), an annex to the report ([Document 175](#)), and a draft of telegram 534 to Saigon ([Document 181](#)), which was essentially the draft report to the NSC in cable form.

² The changes made in the draft at the instruction of President are explained in the footnotes to [Document 181](#). See also [Document 180](#).

³ Neither attached, but see [Documents 167](#) and [181](#).

180. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, October 5, 1963—5:38 p.m.

533. Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge. From Bundy, White House. As he approved next following detailed cable of instructions,² the President asked me to send you this personal message from him.

He thinks it of the greatest importance that, to the very limit of our abilities, we should not open this next stage in the press. The decisions and instructions in following telegram are being held most tightly here, and we are making every possible effort to limit public knowledge and to let the Vietnamese Government itself learn from what we do and not what the papers say, so that your negotiations with Diem may be run on your terms. Nothing could be more dangerous than an impression now that a set of major actions is being kicked off and a set of requirements imposed on GVN by U.S. This is of particular importance since some officials and reporters honorably believe in just such a public posture of disapproval and pressure. President therefore believes you should personally control knowledge of individual actions and of tactics, and accept, as we will try to, necessary dissatisfaction of determined reporters with cryptic posture.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIEI Top Secret; Immediate. The text of this message was sent to the Department of State from the White House for transmission.

² Document 181.

181. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, October 5, 1963—5:39 p.m.

534. Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge.

1. Following is overall instruction resulting from NSC consideration of McNamara/Taylor report and recommendations together with those you have submitted in recent weeks. These instructions have the President's personal approval. At any time you feel it is necessary you may state to GVN that you are acting under the specific instructions of the President as recommended by the National Security Council.
2. Actions are designed to indicate to Diem Government our displeasure at its political policies and activities and to create significant uncertainty in that government and in key Vietnamese groups as to future intentions of United States. At same time, actions are designed to have at most slight impact on military or counterinsurgency effort against Viet Cong, at least in short term.
3. The recommendations on negotiations are concerned with what US is after, i.e., GVN action to increase effectiveness of its military effort; to ensure popular support to win war; and to eliminate strains on US Government and public confidence. The negotiating posture is designed not to lay down specific hard and fast demands or to set a deadline, but to produce movement in Vietnamese Government along these lines. In this way we can test and probe effectiveness of any actions the GVN actually takes and, at same time, maintain sufficient flexibility to permit US to resume full support of Diem regime at any time US Government deems it appropriate.
4. We recognize that recommended actions cannot be continued more than a limited period—tentatively estimated at two to four months—before they begin to have substantial impact on counterinsurgency effort. Even within this period, they will require careful and constant evaluation. As they begin to have substantial impact on war effort, further major decisions will be needed.

5. It is not possible to specify with precision the criteria that we should use in determining whether this proposed course of action has brought about adequate changes in performance of Diem Government and should, therefore, be modified or withdrawn, or whether on contrary response of the Diem Government is clearly inadequate so that more drastic action should be considered. The desired GVN measures in this report are grouped under three headings: (1) military actions, (2) political actions, and (3) actions with respect to US itself. Test of adequacy of these actions should be whether, in combination, they improve effectiveness of GVN effort to point where we can carry on in confident expectation that war effort will progress satisfactorily. Since we cannot now foresee interlocking impact of possible actions both in GVN and here, we obviously do not expect that GVN will or even can perform on entire list and for this reason this is in no sense a package of demands. While general view here is that some action in each of three areas will be necessary, we do not now wish to prejudge question of balance or quantity of actions which may justify resumption of full cooperation with GVN.²

A. Actions:

6. AID Commodity Import Program. Existing suspension of new commitments will be maintained, and under this policy the presently due second-quarter allocation of \$20-25 million will be withheld. You should make this continued suspension clear in an appropriate manner to the GVN.

No public announcement will be made. In addition, US working levels should inform Vietnamese military that commodity import assumptions being used for budget planning purposes must now be considered uncertain not only from previously stated standpoint of Congressional uncertainty, but because of executive review of program.

7. PL 480. Presently pending supplementary agreement for \$2.9 million worth of condensed milk (5-months' requirement) will be handled by making month-to-month agreements for appropriate portions of this amount until further notice, but outright suspension will not be undertaken. Action on other pending items in PL 480 account will become due with respect to wheat flour (\$6 million annually) and raw cotton (\$12 million annually) approximately 1 November, and these items will then be submitted for action by Washington. Remainder of presently planned PL 480 for FY 1964, comprising tobacco (\$2.5 million) and miscellaneous items (\$2.5 million), does not require any action in next 60

days. Discussions with GVN on PL 480, especially with respect to food, should take note of fact that no deliveries are being held up or negative decisions made; we are simply not able to make forward decisions in October.

8. AID Project Loans. Presently pending balance of loan projects for Saigon-Cholon Waterworks (\$10 million) and Saigon electric power project (\$4 million) will be "suspended for review," and you should inform GVN in appropriate manner to this effect without making public announcement. If this becomes publicly known here or in field, explanation will be limited strictly to bare statement of suspension for review.³

9. Assistance to Forces Commanded by Colonel Tung in or near Saigon. You should inform GVN, through whatever channel you deem appropriate, that US can no longer furnish support to these forces unless they are placed under effective operational control of Joint General Staff and committed to field operations. (This applies to MAP [less than 1 line not declassified] support for certain airborne ranger, Civil Guard, and "civilian airborne ranger" units.) Again no public announcement will be made, but if action becomes known explanation here and in field will be that we cannot assist forces that are not contributing to the war effort. Notion that action is a reprisal for political use of these forces should be discouraged.⁴

10. Handling of GVN Inquiries in Saigon: US representatives in Saigon should make clear that these matters must be taken up with you personally.

B. Negotiating Tactics:

Your policy toward the GVN of cool correctness in order to make Diem come to you is correct. You should continue it. However, we realize it may not work and that at some later time you may have to go to Diem to ensure he understands over-all US policy. Decision of when this becomes imperative rests with you, in light of your assessment of situation.

12. If, as we hope, Diem seeks clarification of US policies and actions, you should present an exposition of how our actions are related to our fundamental objective of victory. There are three issues at root of strained relations between GVN and US and of our judgment that

victory may be jeopardized. The first concerns military effort; GVN must take steps to make this more effective. The second is crisis of confidence among Vietnamese people which is eroding popular support for GVN that is vital for victory. The third is crisis of confidence on the part of the American public and Government. Heart of problem is form of government that has been evolving in Viet-Nam. Diem's regime has trappings of democracy, but in reality it has been evolving into authoritarian government maintained by police terrorist methods. What GVN must do is to reverse this process of evolution.

13. To preserve flexibility and provide an opportunity for testing and probing on effectiveness of measures GVN actually takes, you should avoid laying down specific demands, but consider actions listed below as illustrative examples of general proposition outlined above, picking and choosing particular items as situation warrants.

14. Purpose of all actions listed below is to increase effectiveness of war effort, to ensure popular support, and to relieve strains in GVN/US relations.

15. Specific military actions listed below are probably most acceptable to Diem, but serve as a test of his commitment to furthering war effort. They should increase effectiveness of war effort and this in turn should feed back to improve political climate. We believe that burden of pressure for military actions should be assumed by General Harkins in direct conversation with Diem and others under your general guidance and that these conversations should not await initiative by Diem, since our continuing posture of cooperative consultation on military matters should not be broken. Conversely, Harkins should not be channel of a discussion on relation between improvements by GVN and resumption of full US support.⁵

16. Political actions are not arranged in order of importance. First of political actions, i.e., entering into negotiations to normalize university life, etc., should set stage for later political actions, such as broadening government.

17. If, in fact, GVN does begin to move along lines we desire, an opportunity will be provided to test and probe effectiveness of the actions in improving war effort, ensuring popular support, and easing strain in GVN/US relations. Paramount need, however, is for GVN to set a psychological tone and image that will make specific actions both real and credible. Although we cannot at this time in complete confidence

predict the exact point in this complex of actions at which we will be sure war effort will proceed to successful conclusion, it seems probable its achievement will require some restriction of role of Nhus. As practical matter, we would expect that Diem would not take such action at outset, but only after he had proceeded a considerable distance down the path we desire.

18. *Military*

- a. Further shift of military emphasis and strength to Delta (IV Corps).
- b. Increase in military tempo in all corps areas, so that all combat troops are in 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. Expansion of personnel in combat units to full authorized strength.
- e. Training and arming of hamlet militia at accelerated rate, especially in the Delta.
- f. Consolidation of 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 civil action programs can be introduced

19. *Political*

- a. *Resumption of normal university life.* Detained students should be released; school and university classes should be universally resumed. Diem should sit down with rector and faculty of Saigon University to work out conditions of normalization of university life. Since students are fearful of arrests and inclined to riots, this will involve significant negotiations on a variety of police-terrorist techniques, including secret arrests, torture, beatings, etc. For this reason, it is an excellent technique to get Diem to focus on the core issues. Similar action should be taken in regard to Hue University, including reinstatement of ax-rector. In both universities, at least some faculty members who have resigned, been fired or jailed should be reinstated.
- b. *Specific concessions should be made to Buddhists.* Those still jailed should be processed for release with all possible speed. Repair of pagodas should be facilitated with government sponsorship. GVN-sponsored "Union Committee for Pure Buddhism" should be expanded and genuinely representative Buddhist leaders given responsible positions. Assembly action should eliminate laws which deny equal status to Buddhism.

- c. *Renewed activity in land reform program.* This was an early Diem achievement but stopped short of completion. It could be revitalized and attract rural support for the GVN and improve its international image.
- d. *Joint re-emphasis on political aspects of strategic hamlet program.* Phasing and security aspects of strategic hamlet program are dealt with under section 1 above. Following is concerned with aspects of strategic hamlet program affecting popular attitudes. This would require an effort to gain more support from peasants through increasing payments to them for their labor and other services and through weeding out graft by local officials. In addition, particularly in Delta, redesigning the program to avoid unnecessary relocation of population and increased emphasis on social and economic programs that are likely to elicit peasant support.
- e. *Police techniques.* GVN should abandon its present practices of controlling populace by instilling fear through night-time arrests, brutal interrogation (including women) and other police-terrorist methods which contribute to growing resentment and unrest and diminishing acceptance of regime.
- f. *Civil liberties should be restored.* Arbitrary arrests should cease and those arrested speedily released or given fair public trial. Religious freedom should be implemented as guaranteed by constitution. Public gatherings should be permitted and controlled only to insure safety of life and property.
- g. *Refurbishing GVN image.* Government should be broadened so as to include respected individuals, including some within Viet-Nam who have not participated in government and some, such as Vu Van Mau, who have departed. It should be pointed out that these respected individuals are not likely to participate in government or return to Viet-Nam until changes such as those described above convince them that GVN has in fact reversed trend towards authoritarian government. Their willingness to accept posts in government or return to Viet-Nam will in turn be convincing evidence to mass of population that changes are, in fact, meaningful.
- h. *"Changes in personnel."* Specific "reforms" described above are apt to have little impact without dramatic symbolic move which convinces Vietnamese that reforms are real. As practical matter this can only be achieved by some feasible reduction in influence of Nhus, who are—justifiably or not—a symbol of authoritarianism. Future role of Nhus in government is therefore of paramount importance. At this point it is impossible to tell whether Nhu must be permanently removed or merely confined to well-defined and limited role. In either case, some device must be found both to restrict his activities and to symbolize

this restriction by his absence from power center in Saigon. In addition, similar devices must be found for those individuals, such as Colonel Tung, who are most closely associated with Nhu and his authoritarianism.

- i. *Public and official statement by Diem* before National Assembly which would set new tone for government by pointing to steps being taken to respond to popular sentiment, and by making a call for total mobilization of effort on part of officials and people equally.

20. *US/GVN Relations*

- a. Avoid divisive press attacks, e.g. *Times of Viet-Nam* story attacking CIA, etc.
- b. Cease public statements slandering the US effort and the role of US military and civilian personnel.
- c. Cease undercover efforts to discredit the US and weaken the will of US individuals to give their full support to programs, e.g. "mendacious briefings" of GVN troops and rumors of physical danger to US families and other personnel.
- d. Re-cast GVN propaganda in such a way as to gain foreign support of its socio-economic program.

C. Congress, Press, and Public:

21. No public statement will be issued here for the present.

22. At President's next press conference, he expects to repeat his basic statement that what furthers the war effort we support, and what interferes with the war effort we oppose. If questioned on actions US may take, he expects to say only that US programs are being reviewed to insure consistency with this policy.⁶

23. Similar responses will be given if information about any US actions leads to detailed inquiries. If detailed inquiries pinpointing specific actions are made, they will be dealt with as indicated in each paragraph of A., above.

24. On Tuesday and Wednesday⁷ in meetings with Congressional committees in executive session, Rusk, McNamara and Bell will follow same line. They will explain our three-fold concern as outlined in para 5, above, but they will avoid as you should any listing of desired actions which could be construed as a package of US demands. We believe it of

great importance that there should be no public impression of a package of sanctions and a package of demands. We are seeking necessary but limited improvements from a government very difficult to move, and we do not wish to encourage unjustified sense of optimism or of triumph from those who wish this situation was easier than it is. In particular, we would prefer press to consider us inactive than to trumpet a posture of "major sanctions" and "sweeping demands." (You should follow same line in briefing Zablocki Codel.)⁸

D. Coordination in Saigon:

25. Separate cables to Harkins and Brent lay out their areas of these instructions in detail.⁹ You should, of course, coordinate all actions by country team representatives. Suggest you pass this cable to them individually.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate Prepared by Hilsman with clearances of Harriman and Bundy. Cleared in draft with Rusk and McNamara. Regarding the drafting of this cable, see [Document 179](#). Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD exclusive for Felt.

² The last sentence in paragraph 5 was in neither the Draft Report to the NSC of October 4 nor the attached cable. Its inclusion rejects the President's concern as expressed at the 9:30 a.m. meeting of October 5; see [Document 179](#). The changes noted in footnotes 3-6 below also reflect the President's concern.

³ The last sentence in paragraph 8 is in neither the Draft Report to the NSC nor the draft cable.

⁴ The last two sentences in paragraph 9 replace the following sentence in the Draft Report to the NSC and the draft cable: "Concurrently MACV should assume operational relationships with border surveillance and mountain scout forces [*less than 1 line not declassified*] commanded by Colonel Tung."

⁵ The last two sentences of paragraph 15 were neither in the Draft Report to the NSC nor the draft cable.

⁶ The draft of telegram 534 to Saigon expanded President Kennedy's statement: "that in line with this policy Secretary McNamara and General

Taylor have recommended that certain programs be reviewed; and that, on your additional recommendation, a small number of programs have been held up in order to permit review to determine their consistency with policy he has enunciated. He will say all other programs are being continued, in line with US policy of supporting war effort against the Communist aggression."

The draft continues:

"In the meantime, you will have informed GVN through appropriate channels, as outlined in the section concerning actions above, of the steps US is taking."

"If, as a result of your actions, inquiries are made about the programs under review, by either GVN or press, replies will state that certain programs have been held up, on your recommendation, to permit review for consistency with policy President has enunciated of supporting what furthers war effort and opposing what interferes with it; and that the bulk of the programs, which clearly further war effort, are being continued.

"At some point, after you have appropriately informed GVN, and after the President has made the statements described above, inquiries concerning Tung's forces should be made with statement that, in line with its policy, United States has terminated support to certain military units which are not contributing to the prosecution of the war."

⁷ October 8-9.

⁸ Congressman Clement J. Zablocki chaired a special study mission to Southeast Asia, composed of members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, which traveled to Laos, Malaysia, and Vietnam, October 3-19. Also on the mission were Congressmen Harris B. McDowell, Jr., Ronald Brooks Cameron, William T Murphy, William S. Broomfield, I Irving Whalley, Vernon W. Thomson, and Peter H.B. Frelinghuysen. See [Document 222](#).

⁹ The Joint Chiefs of Staff sent Harkins and Felt these instructions in JCS 2792, October 5. The cable was substantively the same as the first three numbered paragraphs of section B of the Taylor-McNamara Report, [Document 167](#). (Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET)

The instructions to Brent were in AIDto 915, October 5, and were essentially a reiteration of MD-related actions and tactics. (*Ibid.*, AID (US) S VIET)

182. Telegram From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)¹

Washington, October 5, 1963.

CAP 63560. In conjunction with decisions and recommendations in separate Deptel,² President today approved recommendation that no initiative should now be taken to give any active covert encouragement to a coup. There should, however, be urgent covert effort with closest security under broad guidance of Ambassador to identify and build contacts with possible alternative leadership as and when it appears. Essential that this effort be totally secure and fully deniable and separated entirely from normal political analysis and reporting and other activities of country team. We repeat that this effort is not to be aimed at active promotion of coup but only at surveillance and readiness. In order to provide plausibility to denial suggest you and no one else in Embassy issue these instructions orally to Acting Station Chief and hold him responsible to you alone for making appropriate contacts and reporting to you alone.

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

¹ Source: United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, p. 574. Top Secret. Sent via CIA channels.

² Document 181.

183. Memorandum by the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' Special Assistant (Sullivan)¹

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Divergent Attitudes in U.S. Official Community

Secretary McNamara has asked me to examine the nature and the cause of differing opinions and attitudes in the official US community in Vietnam. Specifically, he is concerned with the divergent evaluations of the success which we are having in "winning the war against the Viet Cong."

I have talked with various members of the official community and have, in general, covered the same ground with each element of the Country Team. My first observation is that there are divergencies but that they do not divide cleanly and sharply along Service and Department lines. Within each of the elements of the Team, there are individuals who hold views more or less at variance with the majority of others in their element. However, insofar as any general watershed of opinion can be detected, it finds the civilian components of the Country Team on one hand and the military components on the other.

In approaching the views of these two general communities or the basic question of "winning the war", I soon became aware that, in their answers, they were addressing themselves fundamentally to two different questions. The military directed themselves primarily to the more active, physical task of counterinsurgency, i.e., conducting clear and hold operations, building strategic hamlets, isolating the population from the Viet Cong, organizing protection for the cleared areas, and prodding the ARVN into search and destroy actions against Viet Cong strongholds.

The civilians, on the other hand, directed themselves more to the psychological aspects of the problem. They were concerned less with the physical task of eliminating Viet Cong operations and more with the job of eliminating those mental attitudes among the population which made the people receptive and susceptible to the subversive and propaganda activities of the Viet Cong.

Moreover, the military are oriented towards a specific mission which they are undertaking. They feel a justifiable sense of accomplishment in the results they have achieved to date. They can measure the indices of their progress and have a "can-do", "gung-ho" sense of confidence in their ability to complete their mission.

The civilians, on the other hand (with the exception of USOM), are oriented towards a more passive and more frustrating task of attempting to dissuade an oriental regime from its method of governing and to persuade it to use other methods which involve more empathy towards the popular mind. They constantly watch the Government, despite their urgings, throw away opportunities to gain greater popular acceptance. They feel that each of these occasions gives new advantages to the Viet Cong and that each constitutes a step backward in the psychological battle. They do not, in general, discount the physical progress that has been made in the counterinsurgency effort, but they are inclined to question the quality of its efforts in the light of the Government's political ineptness.

Hence, the military and the civilian components of the Country Team approach the same set of data from different perspectives. They fall almost inevitably into the classic postures of the two men who look at the same glass of water—one sees it half full, the other sees it half empty. This difference in perspective is then magnified by the imprecision of the data examined. All honest US observers admit that there are great margins of tolerance and doubt in the statistics on which they base their conclusions. Therefore, there is an opportunity for a great deal of subjective interpretation in deriving a conclusion from a given set of "facts".

Moreover, and compounding this essential occasion for divergence, there enters into the picture a considerable emotional element. On the military side, this takes the form of professional or service pride. Any suggestion that success is not being attained is considered a personal affront, a reflection impugning the achievements of the US armed forces. On the civilian side, any effort by the military to reach essentially political or intelligence conclusions is considered an incursion into or even the pre-emption of a field of activity which should be properly civilian.

Finally, and as the ultimate fillings to the emotional charge, is the simple problem of the pecking order. When I came here a year ago with General Taylor, it was my observation that the "top banana" in the US official community was General Harkins. This was understandable, not

only was he a senior officer in the Army, but he was a man with a considerable reputation and experience. He disposed of infinitely more resources than the Ambassador and he had a far more impressive establishment responsive to his direct command. Moreover, he and his command represented the new and the current thrust of highest level US policy interest in Vietnam. He was the executor of the main US drive of the day in which there was invested a great measure of US prestige.

Fritz Nolting, on the other hand, was a fairly junior US Foreign Service Officer of no particular international reputation and prestige. He was undertaking his first assignment as an Ambassador in a part of the world in which he had no depth of experience. He had very limited resources at his direct disposal and a relatively small staff. He knew and understood the direction and the design of top-level US policy. With good common sense and discretion, Fritz "got on the team" and made no contest to assume a prerogative of control. This does not suggest that he was a doormat; it merely means that he chose what he quite sensibly considered to be the most effective way to exercise his talents and to utilize his resources.

This arrangement caused some grumbling in the civilian side of the Country Team. As disciplined professionals, they buckled down and did their part in contributing to the US operational effort. However, they had a number of nagging doubts about the qualitative effect of the effort in which they were engaged. A number of them expressed these doubts to me privately when I was here. When I suggested that they report them officially through regular channels, I was later advised that most of their critical analysis was moderated before being sent or else was not finally sent on to Washington.

As a result of this situation, a certain head of emotional pressure built up in the Embassy which finally erupted into the open after Fritz went on home leave and while Trueheart was in charge. Once again, this was brought in check upon Fritz's return to duty here.

Finally, when Ambassador Lodge arrived on the scene, two things happened. First, he was a man of international political stature, considerable experience as an Ambassador and the bearer of Presidential assurances that he was, and should act as US "top banana" in Vietnam. This change of style was immediately apparent to everyone in the official US community and has had the usual intangible effects which go with such changeovers. Second, he has come to the conclusion that the "doubting Thomases" in the civilian component, those who hold the "we

cannot win with Diem" attitude are correct. This, in turn, has had its predictable and largely intangible consequences in the emotional quotient of the problem.

Finally, however, I believe a word of evaluation is necessary with respect to current attitudes among the diverging components. With very rare exceptions, there is no bitterness. The period of operational harmony built up in the Nolting period has resulted in some very close friendships and good working relations across the board. The dedication of all sequents [segments?] of the Team to make the program succeed is great enough and the men involved are mature enough to be submerged in hard work. On operational problems, there is no impairment of effectiveness discernible as yet. All officers I have talked to show a genuine concern that this situation will continue without change no matter what the more introspective differences may bring in the way of divergencies.

W.H. Sullivan²

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret. A note on the source text indicates that this memorandum was taken from the President's weekend reading of October 6, and that its approximate date was October 5. Sullivan was a member of the Taylor-McNamara Mission to Vietnam, September 24-October 1, and he labeled this a "Mission Memorandum."

² Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

184. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 6, 1963, 7 p.m.

642. 1. Your 534.²

2. An excellent instruction outlining a course of action which should yield constructive results.

3. I plan to let the continued suspension of the Commodity Import Program become evident without my calling attention to it in so many words. I am credibly informed that it is worrying Diem now, and that he will have to speak to me about it.

4. In general, U.S. representatives in Saigon will handle specific matters in accordance with your para. 10.

5. I am calling key Country Team members together tomorrow and am passing your cable to them individually now.

6. Assume this supersedes previous telegram concerning suspension or cutting off of aid.³

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate Eyes Only. Received at 7:59 a.m. and passed to the White House at 8:17 a.m.

² Document 181.

³ Apparent reference to [Document 148](#).

185. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 6, 1963, 8 p.m.

643. For Bundy.

1. Your message contained in Deptel 533.²
2. I will of course comply in every particular in not opening our work to the press—a policy in which I deeply believe. I will personally control knowledge of future cables, limiting them to DCM, to personal assistant, myself, and the rather large number of clerks and communications people who under our system must be in the know. I will not even bring in the Chief of the Political Section unless absolutely necessary. Of course Harkins, Brent and Smith will have to control their own offices and I am cautioning them. It is indeed most desirable to confront the Government of Viet-Nam with deeds rather than words, which are of little use, and I will certainly accept whatever dissatisfaction all this causes to reporters.
3. I would like to explain certain features of the press situation here concerning which helpful action might be taken in Washington, as follows:
 - a. Some agencies here have much better press relations than others. For example, CAS, which should have no press relations at all, has the worst, and this raises questions as to whether it is properly organized. I say this without prejudice to anyone, least of all anyone in CAS here. But a situation has arisen, doubtless brought about by the course of events, which requires attention.
 - b. Reporters here have unlimited ways of getting material in this city, which contains thousands of loquacious Americans. For example, last night Sheehan of UPI called several Embassy officers regarding departure of CAS Station Chief and was told nothing. At this writing (Sunday noon, Saigon) I know nothing of what is in U.S. press. Yet I would bet that Sheehan found someone who informed him and that word of CAS Station Chief's departure is in print in U.S.³
 - c. One thing is certain: reporters here will write something every day. If U.S. Government gives nothing, they will work something up somehow. I wish I thought that it was possible for General Harkins and USOM to organize an extensive program to familiarize the press

with interesting military and social economic programs in the countryside. But I believe that this would at most create one story and that they would all be back trying to ferret out the big story.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. Received at 9:15 a.m. and passed to the White House at 9:45 a.m.

² Document 180.

³ According to telegram 651 from Saigon, October 7, United Press International reported on October 7 that John Richardson was being recalled and that "informed sources" indicated he would not return to Saigon. (Department of State, Central Files, POL S VIET-US)

186. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 7, 1963, 7 p.m.

652. For Secretary Rusk pass to McNamara.

1. Herewith further thoughts on your 534.²
2. Language in paragraphs 17 and 19-h on "restriction on role of Nhu" seems unrealistic for these reasons:
 - a. On basis of my present knowledge, it is clear that U.S. has provided the weapons, training and money to enable Nhu to have in effect adequate army of his own, consisting of men who are carefully selected, intensely indoctrinal [indoctrinated] and well paid. For its size, it is a formidable force and man for man appears to have a big edge over an ordinary military outfit. For some inexplicable reason, we appear to have done all this without our having any effective strings whatever on the use of this force. Our only possible leverage would be cutting off funds, but it is hard to believe that this would be effective.
 - b. In an interview with the Italian journalist Gambino for the Italian illustrated weekly Espresso which is to be published in Italy on Thursday (complete English translation being pouched),³ Nhu says in effect that he can and would like to get along without the Americans. He only wants some helicopter units and some money. But he definitely does not want American military personnel who, he says, are absolutely incapable of fighting a guerrilla war. Even the Special Forces created by Kennedy are not worth anything. He wants Viet-Nam to be treated as U.S. treats Yugoslavia—giving them money but not seeking to influence their system of government. He says that he and the President were against massive American intervention even at "the time of greatest danger, that is, the winter of 1961-1962". The war cannot be won with the Americans because they are an obstacle to the revolutionary transformation of society which is the prerequisite of victory. Then come these words: "If the Americans were to interrupt their help, it may not be a bad thing after all." He said that if his father-in-law, former Ambassador Chnong, were to "come to Saigon, I will have his head cut off. I will hang him in the center of a square and let him dangle there.

My wife will make the knot on the rope because she is proud of being a Vietnamese and she is a good patriot."

- c. Within the last few days the Minister of Civic Action Hieu said to one of my (very few, alas!) highly reliable sources: "We don't need the Americans any more even in the economic field, as we can confront our economic problems with our own resources." Present suspension of Commodity Import Program may give GVN a chance to decide whether Hieu is right.
 - d. Diem in his message to the National Assembly today, speaking of the forthcoming victory over the Viet Cong, says that it will "show the small countries of the non-aligned world (tiers monde) that they too can strangle Communist subversive war." He also singled out the World Assembly of the Interparliamentary Union (scene of Madame Nhu's activity) as the place where Viet-Nam, on the international field, has played a notable role.
3. The above leads me to the conclusion that we cannot remove the Nhuses by non-violent means against their will.
 4. I also conclude that we cannot assume that Diem and Nhu have the same aims as we. Clearly Nhu wants our help without our presence which, in his view, we use as an excuse for interfering in their internal system of government. Get us out, he argues, and he can be as free to do as he wants as Tito is now. And Nhu is a strong influence on Diem.
 5. Paragraphs 3 and 4 make it hard to see today a good future for the U.S.-GVN relationship. I say this because the only thing which the U.S. really wants—the removal of or restriction on the Nhuses—is out of the question. Yet, none of the points 19 a-i look really important.
 6. I believe Diem and Nhu see U.S. pressing for things such as removal of Nhuses, release of students which they are absolutely sure they cannot give and that we should consider a request to withdraw as a growing possibility. The beginning of withdrawal might trigger off a coup.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. Received at 9:17 a.m. and passed to the Department of Defense exclusive for McNamara and to the White House at 10:55 a.m.

² Document 181.

³ No pouched translation of this interview of October 3 has been found, but an English text of the interview of Thursday, October 3, is attached to a memorandum from Kattenburg to Forrestal, October 24. (Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, Honolulu Conference, Nov. 20, 1963)

187. Memorandum of White House Staff Meeting¹

Washington, October 7, 1963, 8 a.m.

[Here follows discussion of matters unrelated to Vietnam.]

8. *Vietnam*. Everyone is bracing for Madame Nhu's visit. Forrestal remarked Madame Nhu has great attractive powers; even Hilsman is weakening and agrees some of the things she says make sense. On Vietnam in general, Bundy commented that he was surprised that some people were taking as "pollyanna-ish" the "McNamara-Taylor" statement that we could pull out of Vietnam in two years.² He said what struck him was that two years was really a long time, considering that by then the war would have lasted four years—or longer than most wars in US history. General Clifton said the President undoubtedly would be asked about it Wednesday at his press conference.³ (The conference was news to all assembled.) The general line will be that in two years the Vietnamese will be able to finish the job without US military forces on the scene—a position considered reasonable by everyone around the table.

Bundy also asked Forrestal to draw together the recent materials on Vietnam and issue an appropriate NSAM. He said that the New York Times had the only version of what was decided at a recent NSC meeting, and while he did not mind communicating with various agencies through the Times, General Taylor had suggested the need for something more official.

[Here follows discussion of matters unrelated to Vietnam.]

¹ Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by W.Y. White.

² See [Document 170](#).

³ The President was asked questions on Vietnam at his October 9 press conference, but not specifically about the 2-year projected time span for American disengagement from Vietnam. For the transcript of the conference, see Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1963, pp. 767-774.

188. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Washington, October 7, 1963—10:30 a.m.

SUBJECT

Southeast Asia

PARTICIPANTS

French

Foreign Minister Couve de Murville
Ambassador Alphand
M. Charles Lucet, Director of Political Affairs, Foreign Ministry
M. Pierre Pelen, French Emb.

U.S.

The Secretary
Ambassador Bohlen
Mr. William R. Tyler
Mr. Johannes V. Imhof, WE

In response to an earlier question by the Secretary, M. Couve de Murville briefly discussed Laos and Vietnam. Vietnam was the key because there would be no trouble in Laos were it not for North Vietnamese activities. M. Couve de Murville said that he understood that the Secretary had earlier been interested in what information the French had from North Vietnam. Actually, the French had very little information. Chinese influence there undoubtedly had increased. Ho Chi Minh remained basically anti-Chinese but many of the newer ministers belonged to the pro-Chinese faction. The economic situation was rather bad, but the regime remained strong politically. In view of the increased Chinese role, it therefore seemed likely that the U.S. in Vietnam would gradually come increasingly face to face with the Chinese. The French had made this experience in the past and had found it necessary to reach most of the major agreements on Vietnam with the Chinese.

The Secretary said that if the Chinese and the North Vietnamese would leave South Vietnam alone, our troops could be withdrawn. This was, however, not the case. The Secretary said that an error had perhaps been made in the past when insufficient attention had been paid to the joint strategic evaluation of the key importance of the Red River Valley.

M. Couve de Murville said that the destiny of Vietnam was to be neutral. Such a solution might come about in the long run. The problem was how to get rid of the communist regime in North Vietnam.

The Secretary agreed. He said that North Vietnam was now taking the position that a settlement would require changes in the regime in South Vietnam but none in the North. M. Couve de Murville said that this was obviously an unrealistic position. Perhaps the increased dependence of North Vietnam on Communist China might in the long run provide some hope for the formation of a government of national union. The population in North Vietnam remained strongly anti-Chinese.

¹ Source: Department of State, Secretary's Memoranda of Conversation: Lot 65 D 330, Oct. 1963. Secret. Drafted by Johannes Imhof. The meeting was held at the Department of Stat.

189. Memorandum of a Conversation¹

Washington, October 7, 1963—4:30 p.m.

SUBJECT

Franco-American Relations and Europe

PARTICIPANTS

US

The President
Mr. Ball
Ambassador Bohlen
Mr. Tyler

France

Mr. Couve de Murville
Ambassador Alphand
Mr. Lucet

[Here follows discussion of matter unrelated to Vietnam.]

He [the President] said he thought that we were quite close on Laos, but General De Gaulle's statement on Vietnam had been unhelpful, particularly with regard to its timing. The Foreign Minister said that it had not been General De Gaulle's intention to do anything unhelpful. France had been in a position at the time when she had to say something. France had never had very good relations with the Diem Government. There was a French interest in developing economic and cultural, rather than political, relations. He felt that in the long run, evolution seemed to lead in the direction of the unification and neutrality of Vietnam. He said that he was aware that the statement had been badly received in Washington, but it had been no better received in Moscow or Peiping. Mr. Ball repeated that the timing had been unfortunate. The Foreign Minister said he did not know what the real situation was in Vietnam. The President said he thought it was being made to appear worse than it is. The Foreign Minister said France had been in Indochina during a period of some ninety years and her experience had always been that any problems must be discussed with the Chinese. He thought that this held true today also. He said the Russians were out of Vietnam and Southeast Asia in general and that they have almost no influence there. He said they were in roughly the same position as the UK: both were getting less and less influential, whereas the Chinese influence was increasing.

[Here follows discussion of matters unrelated to Vietnam.]

¹ Source: Department of State, President's Memoranda of Conversations: Lot 66 D 149. Secret. Drafted by Tyler and approved by Bundy and Ball. The meeting was held at the White House.

190. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations (Dutton) to the Secretary of State¹

Washington, October 8, 1963.

SUBJECT

Foreign Relations Committee Session with Secretary McNamara

Following are the principal questions asked by members of the Foreign Relations Committee of Secretary McNamara and General Taylor Tuesday morning:²

1.

What are the differences, if any, among State, Defense, and the CIA on policy in South Viet-Nam? McNamara indicated that there were generally no significant differences. He was questioned at length about the CIA and said that he thought those questions should really be answered by John McCone; at the same time, however, he said that while the CIA had carried out its mission as prepared in Washington, he thought that the assignment had been overly broad (operational in nature) and that this was now being corrected.

He observed that there were also no significant differences between Diem and Nhu, although characterizing Diem as the public figure and Nhu as the real operator, with neither controlling Madame Nhu.

Hickenlooper asked whether there were any differences between Lodge and Richardson and, if so, were these bucked to Secretary Rusk and John McCone? McNamara indicated he was not the best one to answer that question. Hickenlooper was basing his questions on a news article³ which he said had reported that State and the CIA could not agree and had had to go to the White House on it.

2. Hickenlooper dwelled at length on the incorrectness of the allegations in the October 2 story in the "Daily News" by Richard Stearns [*sic*] and asked for a point-by-point refutation by McNamara. Hickenlooper indicated he would go over the same ground with the Secretary of

State.⁴ Hickenlooper is concerned primarily with defending the CIA against critical attack.

3. Senator Morse asked a long series of questions seeking the reason the U.S. is largely going it alone and getting only token assistance from other countries.
4. Senators Morse, Carlson, Church and Gore, all of whom were most critical of U.S. policy in South Viet-Nam, asked whether there is not an alternative to the present government and whether it was McNamara's opinion that it could be effective despite the repressions and political difficulties that have been encountered. McNamara kept trying to rephrase this line of questions in terms of whether the Diem Government is the most effective we can get under the circumstances.
5. Senator Fulbright wanted to know whether more, less, or about the same amount of aid will be needed for South Viet-Nam in the future?
6. Fulbright wanted to know what the French are doing in South Viet-Nam?
7. Fulbright wanted to know whether the Hilsman cable⁵ discussed in the press was, in fact, cleared with the Defense Department and if not, why not? He was also interested in obtaining comments on the substance of the cable.
8. Confirmation was requested as to the accuracy of the news story that U.S. aid had been cut off for the special force which had led the raid on the pagoda temples, for South Viet-Nam imports and for any other purposes.
9. Senator Gore asked a long line of questions as to whether an appraisal of the situation in South Viet-Nam was primarily a military or political question and, if the latter, the basis for Defense officials making the basic reexamination of U.S. policy in the area?

Senators Hickenlooper and Lausche generally defended the primary theme of McNamara and Taylor that the U.S. is winning the war in South Viet-Nam notwithstanding the repressions. Morse, Church, Gore and Carlson were sharply critical of it. Fulbright, Aiken, Mansfield and Long did not indicate their views.

The Committee plans to hear from John McCone on South Viet-Nam on Friday.⁶

Fred Dutton

P.S. You should also be aware of the attached letter⁷ which came in yesterday from Senator Morse, setting forth a number of questions on the

coup in the Dominican Republic. Morse told me after the committee session today that he has been documenting the extent of interference by American businesses to bring about the coup and apparently intends to make a public case of this.

¹ Source: Department of State, Secretary's Staff Meetings: Lot 66 D 147, FRC Session with McNamara, 10/8/63.

² October 8.

³ The article by Richard Starnes, " 'Arrogant' CIA Disobeys Orders in Viet Nam," was published in the Washington Daily News, October 2, 1963.

⁴ Hickenlooper covered similar ground with Secretary Rusk, whose testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, October 9, is in the National Archives and Records Administration, RG 46, Records of the Committee on Foreign Relations-Declassified Executive Session Hearings.

⁵ Apparent reference to telegram 243, [vol. III, p. 628](#) .

⁶ The session with McCone, Thursday, October 10, is scheduled for publication in the *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 1963.

⁷ Not found.

191. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 9, 1963, 11 a.m.

666. A highly dependable source told me that three weeks ago in the early hours of the morning, the police entered the premises of a Catholic institution and removed three young women, taking them to a sort of prison. In this place the women were not injured. But they saw a larger number of male prisoners who were being tortured, some by beating, some by the application of electric shocks to the genitals. Every day the young women were given "brainwashing" in the form of lectures on "personalism". After two weeks they were allowed to return to their previous abode but every three days they must report back to the prison for a lecture.

Comment: This looks like the application of a straight Communist technique for the sake of brother Nhu's cult of "personalism". This is apparently what is involved by what he calls the "revolution" (which he wants) as compared with what he calls the American "reform" (which he disliked).

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, SOC 14-1 S VIET. Secret; Limit Distribution. Received at 12:53 a.m. and passed to the White House at 1:20 a.m.

192. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)¹

Washington, October 9, 1963.

74228. Eyes only for the Ambassador. Re CAS Saigon 1448.²

1. Believe CAP 63560³ gives general guidance requested reftel. We have following additional general thoughts which have been discussed with President. While we do not wish to stimulate coup, we also do not wish to leave impression that U.S. would thwart a change of government or deny economic and military assistance to a new regime if it appeared capable of increasing effectiveness of military effort, ensuring popular support to win war and improving working relations with U.S. We would like to be informed on what is being contemplated but we should avoid being drawn into reviewing or advising on operational plans or any other act which might tend to identify U.S. too closely with change in government. We would, however, welcome information which would help us assess character of any alternate leadership.
2. With reference to specific problem of General Minh you should seriously consider having contact take position that in present state his knowledge he is unable present Minh's case to responsible policy officials with any degree of seriousness. In order to get responsible officials even to consider Minh's problem, contact would have to have detailed information clearly indicating that Minh's plans offer a high prospect of success. At present contact sees no such prospect in the information so far provided.
3. You should also consider with Acting Station Chief whether it would be desirable in order to preserve security and deniability in this as well as similar approaches to others whether appropriate arrangements could be made for follow-up contacts by individuals brought in especially from outside Vietnam. As we indicated in CAP 63560 we are most concerned about security problem and we are confining knowledge these sensitive matters in Washington to extremely limited group, high officials in White House, State, Defense and CIA with whom this message cleared.

¹ Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, Coup South Vietnam. Top Secret. Also printed in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, vol. 11, p. 769, where it is incorrectly dated October 6.

² Not found. In the Pentagon Papers, this reference is incorrectly cited as CAS 1445.

³ Document 182.

193. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 10, 1963, 5 p.m.

676. For Rusk and Harriman from Lodge.

1. This refers to CAS cables [2 *document numbers not declassified*].²
2. There has been some sort of assassination rumor on the average of about one in every ten days since I have been here, and we have brushed them aside. But the rumors in above-mentioned cables are sufficiently believable to warrant fresh State-Defense planning on two major points:
 - a. If I am assassinated in the way indicated in above reports, the deed will in effect have been done by the GVN, however much they attempt to disguise it, since they will have instigated the mob and will have denied us the police protection which they are totally capable of giving us in view of the very large police force in Saigon which is under their absolute control. This will, therefore, automatically constitute a rupture of diplomatic relations and means that present assumptions underlying U.S. presence here would be false. This will have grave consequences for all Americans in Viet-Nam, notably as regards evacuation and there should be fresh contingency planning to cover this situation.
 - b. If I am assassinated, a new situation would be created which might give us a chance to move effectively for a change of government using methods which would now be rejected by U.S. and world opinion, but which would then become acceptable. There should be State-Defense planning on this.
3. For Diem and Nhu even to be thinking of my assassination is so unbelievably idiotic that a reasonable person would reject it out of hand. But Nhu is apparently pleased with his raids on the Buddhist pagodas last summer and is said to be annoyed with me for having advised him to leave the country for awhile. Also he is reported to be smoking opium. For all these reasons my associates here, whose experience antedates mine, consider assassination to be real possibility. Needless to say, this comes as no surprise, as I realized the possibility of this when I accepted this post.
4. I hope to have the entrance gates to the building closed when crowd begins to gather and for the Marines to throw tear gas from inside to

prevent crowd from breaking the gates down. If the crowd tries to enter the building by throwing ladders or other catwalks from the Chinese house next door over to our outside balconies, we will try to throw the ladders off and use tear gas there, too. I plan immediate protest to GVN, either by telephone or via MACV. But I plan no shooting.

5. Am in close consultation with MACV.

6. I have instructed CAS Acting Station Chief to have his agent tell source that if GVN authorities mount such an operation, American retaliation will be prompt and awful beyond description. Source will be invited to examine record of U.S. Marines in Pacific during WW II and ask himself candidly whether GVN wishes to have such a horrible and crushing blow descend on them.³

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, PER-LODGE, HENRY CABOT. Secret; Limit Distribution; Eyes Only. Received at 6:15 a.m. and passed to the White House at 7:07 a.m.

² In these telegrams, both October 9, the CIA distributed intelligence, which it cautioned should "be treated with reserve", to the effect that Nhu had ordered a student demonstration against the U.S. Embassy in which he planned to use 100 agents to attack the Embassy, assassinate Lodge and other Embassy officials, and set the chancery afire. Nhu reportedly feared he could not "handle" Lodge and wished him "eliminated." (*Ibid.*, Har-Van Files, Coup South Vietnam)

³ McCone called Harriman at 11:10 a.m. on October 10 and part of their conversation related to this cable: "Mr. McCone said he is quite disturbed about reporting we get out of Saigon; haven't got a thing-nothing about what happened at Monday meeting. Governor said he would call Hilsman. McCone said all he had seen were few telegrams about assassination Governor said those sounded far-fetched but can't tell. Mr. McCone said Lodge's reply seemed rather hysterical. Governor said he would get after this and let Mr. McCone know if he gets anything." (Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations) The reference to the Monday meeting is apparently to a meeting with General Minh, October 7, to elicit more detailed plans of possible coup planning.

194. National Security Action Memorandum No. 263¹

Washington, October 11, 1963.

TO

Secretary of State
Secretary of Defense
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

SUBJECT

South Vietnam

At a meeting on October 5, 1963,² the President considered the recommendations contained in the report of Secretary McNamara and General Taylor on their mission to South Vietnam.

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

After discussion of the remaining recommendations of the report, the President approved an instruction to Ambassador Lodge which is set forth in State Department telegram No. 534 to Saigon.³

McGeorge Bundy

¹ Source: Department of State, S/S-NSC Files: Lot 72 D 316, NSAMs. Top Secret; Eyes Only. The Director of Central Intelligence and the Administrator of AID also received copies. Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, p. 578.

² See [Document 179](#).

³ Document 181.

195. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, October 14, 1963—9:43 p.m.

576. Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge. Ambassador Lodge from the President. The course of action set out in Deptel 534² obviously requires closest coordination between you and Washington. The gradually increasing effects of suspension of CIP mean that we should be assessing the situation constantly in order to be ready for adjustments in either direction in the light of GVN reactions. But it takes time to work out each new position here, and accordingly it is important to me to have a constant sense of your own evaluation of the situation. I should be glad to have such an evaluation now, in the light of the considerable interval that has passed since McNamara returned with an up-to-date account of your views, and I think it would be helpful if thereafter you could send personal reports at least weekly for my attention. It seems to me that the central issues remain what they have been throughout:

1. Are we gaining or losing on balance and day by day in the contest with the Viet Cong?
2. Is the government responding at any point to our threefold need for improvement in (a) campaign against VC, (b) internal political developments, and (c) actions affecting relations with American people and Government?
3. What does the evidence suggest on the strengthening or weakening of effectiveness of GVN in relation to its own people?
4. And more specifically, what effect are we getting from our own actions under Deptel 534 and what modifications in either direction do you think advisable?

These questions are not intended to be exhaustive, but only to assist in your reports and recommendations by indicating the shape of the problem as seen from here.

McGeorge Bundy has mentioned his brief message from you and while he has no plans currently to leave country, I would be glad to make him available for wholly unofficial and informal visit in near future if you think it important.³

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Top Secret; Priority. The text of this message was sent from Bundy at the White House to the Department of State.

² Document 181.

³ Lodge's suggestion that Bundy come to Vietnam has not been found. In telegram 706 from Saigon, October 15, Lodge thanked the President for his willingness to send Bundy to Vietnam. He continued:

"Would not have brought this up if I did not have a proposal which I think contains new ideas and which might just change the situation here for the better. It cannot be properly handled by telegram or letter and requires a chance for me to have a dialogue with Rusk and/or Harriman and/or Bundy." Lodge then offered to come to Washington for a day. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET)

Telegram 583 to Saigon, October 18, replied to Lodge's proposal as follows:

"The President and Secretary concur that a brief visit by you to Washington at end of October would be helpful. This seems to us better than additional visible missions to you. Suggest two or three days may be better than one because do not wish to give impression of hasty in-and-out call. Normal consultation of Ambassador with major responsibilities seems preferable position." (*Ibid.*)

196. Central Intelligence Agency Information Report¹

Washington, October 14, 1963.

TDCS-3/657,250

SUBJECT

Situation Appraisal as of 12 October 1963

1. This is a field appraisal of the current situation. It is not an official judgement by this Agency or any component. It represents the observations and interpretations of staff officers based on information available to them at the time of its preparation. Prepared for internal use as a guide to the operational environment, this commentary is disseminated in the belief that it may be useful to other agencies in assessing the situation for their own purposes.
2. The dominating factor during the week ending on 12 October 1963 was the strong undercurrent of tension in United States-Government of Vietnam (GVN) relationships, with the Diem regime digesting and seeking to evaluate the implications of President Kennedy's policy statement on South Vietnam² and subsequent statements by the President³ and other American officials. Judging by the articles in the Times of Vietnam, the regime professes to be most impressed by the negative aspects of the Presidential policy pronouncement, i.e., the references to the continued seriousness of the political situation in South Vietnam. The Times of Vietnam chooses to interpret the statements as indicative of continued American determination to overthrow the regime if it does not give in to American pressures for reform. The Times of Vietnam treatment of recent developments conveys the unmistakable impression that the Diem/Nhu combine are prepared to dig in for a protracted war of attrition with the United States, resisting pressures for reform, seeking to mute these pressures by exploiting any differences which may emerge among American policymakers, and attempting to deny the alternative options of the United States by keeping a close watch on dissident or potentially dissident elements in Saigon.
3. The American official community is also now being kept under close scrutiny by the Vietnamese Police and other security elements; the National Police Special Branch Chief Duong Van Hieu's special action group is reportedly attempting to develop incriminating dossiers on selected American officials. Diem himself is reported to have told a

central Vietnamese political leader that while he was strongly in favor of various programs, which could be continued, extreme care should be exercised by responsible Vietnamese officials in their relations with Americans. The most disturbing of all are the reports suggesting the possibility that the regime might stage a "spontaneous" demonstration against the American Embassy, possibly culminating in its sacking and/or the assassination of key officials, including Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. These reports are difficult to evaluate, their sourcing is hazy, and it is possible that they have been deliberately started by the regime as a psychological warfare tactic, aimed at intimidating the United States and keeping the United States off balance. General Confederation of Vietnamese Labor President Tran Quoc Buu has claimed that rumors to the effect that the American Embassy was going to be attacked have been circulating for several weeks. Buu tends to discount them. However, it is believed that it would be a mistake to discount the possibility completely.

4. Conversely, opponents of the regime, including a sizeable portion of the Saigon urban elite both inside and outside of the government, appear disheartened over, and in some cases contemptuous of, American failure to react to what they consider to be highly provocative acts on the part of the regime. The morale of these elements is also being adversely affected by the continued atmosphere of fear and uncertainty brought about by the heavy security controls and by additional arrests. Among those who have been arrested recently are the Senior Vice President of the General Confederation of Vietnamese Labor, Dam Sy Hien; the brother of Lieutenant Colonel Bui Kien Tin, President Diem's physician; and Captain Dinh Thanh Bich, aide to Brigadier General Van Thanh Cao, government delegate for the southeastern provinces. The Special Police are reported to have arrested 130 students in the Saigon area in a surprise roundup on the night of 7 October.
5. Reports indicate, meanwhile, that the regime used the detention period of the students who had been previously arrested b' subsequently released to "reindoctrinate" them and to recruit lead for the new National Union of Students which Ngo Dinh Nhu allegedly in the process of organizing. (*Headquarters comment*: connection between the "new" National Union of Students and existing National Union of Students (Tong Hoi Sinh Vien Viet Nam) is being checked further.) The creation of an ostensibly private student organization to monitor student activities and to absorb or neutralize other more genuine student groups is a typical action of the Diem regime, but it remains to be seen whether, with the present mood of the students, it will be successful in smothering or deflecting their discontent and anti-regime

feeling. Other reports indicate that various student groups are continuing to plan anti-regime activities and that a trend toward some coalescence between these hitherto disparate groups is beginning to develop.

6. There have been no self-burnings by bonzes since the one at the Central Market Place on 5 October; however, Thich Tri Quang, in asylum in the American Embassy, has remarked to Embassy officers that he anticipates many more. The Secondary Intersect Committee leadership, which was reported to have gone underground after the pagoda raids, is probably badly fragmented; another report claimed that intercommunication between various cells of the rebellious Buddhists has been rendered difficult, if not impossible, by present heavy GVN security measures. Organization of further bonze burnings, either by the compartmented cells of Intersect leaders, or uncoordinated suicides by individual Buddhists, is perhaps one of the few feasible gestures which remain open to the dissident Buddhists.
7. We have received several reports tending to confirm indications of GVN belt tightening. Several sources in Saigon have now reported that the government is indeed cutting back on functionary salary payments. A consular officer in Hue reports a similar practice was being adopted there. The policy may merely reflect an anticipatory GVN response to a possible US-initiated cutback in aid. A lesser possibility, but one which cannot be overlooked, is that Ngo Dinh Nhu is conditioning officials to an eventual full break with the United States, brought about at the initiative of the Diem regime.
8. Little information has been received on the progress of the dialogue between the Generals and Diem/Nhu on the allocation of Cabinet portfolios to the military or on other demands reportedly made by the Generals. One possible indication that Diem and Nhu may be meeting with some success in winning over the Generals, or at least in playing for time, is the cool reception Joint General Staff Chief of Staff Brigadier General Tran Thien Khiem recently gave an American official. Khiem has been undecided on the idea of a coup d'etat and it may be that he has been persuaded that it is more in his interest to go along with Nhu. Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, a self-admitted coup d'etat plotter, recently told an American observer that Khiem had informed him that organizing a coup d'etat attempt had been made more difficult by the American policy statement of 2 October, which Khiem chose to interpret as representing American capitulation to Diem and Nhu. Khiem was also quoted as stating that the Vietnamese people do not care who wins the war; they simply want peace. Thao speculated that the Generals' determination to effect a coup d'etat may

also have been eroded by Diem's alleged promise to appoint Generals as Ministers of National Defense, Interior, and Civic Action.

9. One of the major developments on the military front has been the transfer of the Ninth Division, now virtually completed, from the Second Corps area to the Delta, where it will be responsible for the security of the middle tier of Delta provinces with the Seventh Division operating in the provinces nearest Saigon and with the Twenty-First Division remaining in the difficult Ca Mau Peninsula area. This transfer should materially enhance prospects for the improvement in the Delta. The Ninth Division should be especially useful in clear and hold operations in support of the strategic hamlet construction and consolidation, operations which have been all too lacking in the critical Delta area. This unit pioneered in clear and hold operations in Phu Yen and Binh Dinh Provinces. Although the Ninth Division transfer was partially offset in the Second Corps areas by the dispatch of an independent regiment from Long An, it will thin out the forces in the central coastland area. The Vietnamese Communists in the past two weeks have already moved to capitalize on the period of the transfer to substantially step up activities in Binh Dinh Province, the location of one of the more successful GVN province rehabilitation programs. However, in a recent company-sized attack, the enemy sustained a substantial defeat at the hands of the Twenty-Fifth Division, which now is responsible for Binh Dinh and Phu Yen.
10. Field dissem. State (Ambassador Lodge), USMACV (General Harkins), CINCPAC, PACFLT, PACAF, ARPAC.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, CIA Cables. Confidential; Routine; No Foreign Dissem/No Dissem Abroad/Background Use Only/Controlled Dissem. The source text indicates this information was acquired in Saigon on and before October 12; as commentary, it is unappraised. A covering note from Forrestal to McGeorge Bundy, October 16, suggests that the President should read it. A marginal note in Bundy's hand indicates that the President saw it.

² Document 170.

³ Apparent reference to answers to questions at a news conference, October 9. (*Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy*, 1963, pp. 768-769 and 774)

197. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 16, 1963, 7 p.m.

712. Eyes only for the President, pass White House directly. Herewith my best answers to your questions in Deptel 576.² In response to your request will report again in a week. If you prefer a different length or format, please advise.

1.

"Are we gaining or losing on balance and day by day in the contest with the Viet Cong?"

Answer: We appear to me to be doing little more than holding our own. This looks like a long, smoldering struggle, with political and military aspects intertwined, each of which is stubborn in its own way.

Our presence here is a stabilizing influence in Viet-Nam and in Southeast Asia; it also keeps the GVN from being overthrown, which would undoubtedly happen if we were not here. But the U.S. cannot make the people like the Government of Viet-Nam-and hatred of the government could ultimately be deadly serious as regards Army personnel, Army performance, and holding the gains which the Army makes by putting into operation a really effective social and economic program in the strategic hamlets.

2.

"Is the government responding at any point to our three fold need for improvement in (a) campaign against VC, (b) internal political developments and (c) actions affecting relations with American people and government?"

Answer: Under (a) General Harkins reports a shift of boundaries and reallocation of forces. As regards (b) and (c), it is perhaps too early to conclude that the government will not make some positive moves, but it is now doing the opposite of what we would like to see done.

3.

"What does the evidence suggest on the strengthening or weakening of effectiveness of GVN in relation to its own people?"

Answer: The evidence suggests that the Government of Viet-Nam has some of the strength which the government of a police state has, as long as the police remain strong and dependable and the government continues to control the police. Clearly Viet-Nam has such a force and the GVN clearly controls it. But Viet-Nam is not a thoroughly strong police state (much as the "family" would like to make it one) because, unlike Hitler's Germany, it is not efficient and it has in the Viet Cong a large and well-organized underground opponent strongly and ever-freshly motivated by vigorous hatred. And its numbers never diminish.

Viet-Nam has had some kind of war on its soil for more than twenty years, and the people appear to be more than ever anxious to be left alone. In the country, where 85 percent of the people live, as Graham Greene said, "They want enough rice; they don't want to be shot at; they want one day to be much the same as another." Vietnamese are said to be capable of great violence on occasion, but there is no sign of it at the present time.

4.

"And more specifically, what effect are we getting from our own actions under Deptel 534 and what modifications in either direction do you think advisable?"

Answer: So far we appear to be getting virtually no effect from our actions under Deptel 534, but we would not have expected effects this early. The salient action under that program is the withholding of commercial imports. Some local businessmen are worried, but our withholding has not brought a request to me from President Diem, even though Thuan has told me that Diem is worried too. Frankly, I do not expect him to speak to me about it because of his suspicion that, if he asks me to do something for him, I would ask him what he is prepared to do for the U.S. He can, of course, dip into his foreign exchange reserves to meet the cost of the Army for a few months and, in my judgment, that is what he ought to do. If the Army does not mean that much to him, then how can he expect it to mean so much to us? But I oppose continuing to withhold commercial imports to the point where an economic crisis is produced which

might bring about a popular outbreak. This could be extremely dangerous and might result in important and perhaps irreversible Communist gains.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Received at 9:28 a.m. and passed to the White House at 10:25 a.m. and to the CIA and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

² Document 195.

198. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 18, 1963, 4 p.m.

731. Eyes only for Secretary Rusk. Pls pass Secretary McNamara and DCI, Mr. John McCone, eyes only. CINCPAC POLAD exclusive for Admiral Felt.

1. Pursuant to instructions contained para 9 Deptel 534² and elaboration para 3 Deptel 570,³ with MACV concurrence I appointed Major General Richard G. Stilwell, Assistant Chief of Staff J-3 MACV and *[less than 1 line not declassified]* to convey substance of para 9 Deptel 534 to Deputy Secretary of Defense Nguyen Dinh Thuan.
2. General Stilwell and the *[less than 1 line not declassified]* met Thuan at Gia Long Palace by appointment on the morning of October 17. The meeting lasted approximately 45 minutes. Gen. Stilwell opened the conversation by stating that he had recently been traveling with Acting ARVN Chief of Staff, Major General Tran Van Don, to various subordinate headquarters throughout Vietnam and that the purpose of these travels had been to insure that all units were making full contribution to the war effort. Gen. Stilwell added that in this light, this meeting had been requested with Thuan.
3. Thuan immediately stated, "You've come to talk about the special forces." Gen. Stilwell and the *[less than 1 line not declassified]* acknowledged that this was true and then proceeded to explain the structure and support of special forces units in the Saigon area. It was pointed out that of ten special forces companies, seven are members or ARVN and are MAP-supported; three companies are civilian *[less than 1 line not declassified]*. *[less than 1 line not declassified]* then stated that he was instructed to indicate to Thuan that unless the civilian companies were effectively subordinated to the JGS and committed to field operations, all support of these companies would cease. Gen. Stilwell added that this applied to the MAP-supported units also but would be reflected in the long term, under the conditions specified, by a decrease equivalent to seven companies in the overall MAP support budget. It was carefully explained that the purpose of this action was to place these units in direct support of the war effort under his control.

4. Thuan seemed to absorb this fully and repeated his understanding that *[less than 1 line not declassified]* support of special forces would cease unless Vietnamese special forces are effectively subordinated to the JGS and committed to field operations.
5. Thuan was further informed that henceforth payments to mountain scouts and border surveillance personnel would be made only through US Special Forces mechanisms and funds for these programs would no longer be given directly to Col. Tung. Thuan was assured that the actual passage of funds would be through the hands of Vietnamese, not American, officers but that American Special Forces working with their Vietnamese counterparts in the provinces would directly oversee the expenditures of these funds. Thuan was interested in the amounts involved and seemed surprised at their magnitude.
6. Thuan was told that the USG does not plan any public announcement of this step but, if it became known and if the Embassy were queried, we would state that this action had been taken since we cannot support forces not directly contributing to the war effort. Thuan was also informed that this matter would also be taken up directly with Col. Tung. He concurred in this and stated that he would discuss the matter immediately with the President.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S Viet. Secret; Priority. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 6:44 a.m. and passed to the White House, CIA, and Office of the Secretary of Defense.

² Document 171.

³ In this paragraph of telegram 570, October 12, the Departments of State and Defense and the CIA instructed the Embassy to proceed with the transfer of most paramilitary activities under the command of Colonel Tung. Those not approved for transfer were to be reviewed by CIA and MACV for possible transfer. All units should be paid except the special forces which remained in the Saigon vicinity outside the control of the Joint General Staff. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET)

199. Letter From the Acting Director of the United States Information Agency (Wilson) to the Counselor for Public Affairs at the Embassy in Vietnam (Mecklin)¹

Washington, October 18, 1963.

DEAR JONH: I hope I am being overly pessimistic but the days immediately ahead look rather dark for USIS. Your memo to Ambassador Lodge² pertaining to the possible closing down of our field support posts is disquieting. So is the fact that the attacks on USIS not only continue in the Times of Viet-Nam but are now being extended to vernacular newspapers.

I have one thought on the situation which perhaps may be gratuitous, but I would not feel right if I did not pass it on to you. Since the pressure on USIS may well include increased personal pressure on you of the type you have already experienced, you must be extremely careful in the weeks ahead to be cleaner than a hound's tooth. It seems to me that you may have to be unusually circumspect in your relations with the Vietnamese and the U.S. correspondents in order not to allow the GVN the possibility of laying a real glove on you.

I am sure you have thought of this already. I suppose, also, that if the GVN decides to cut USIS down and cut you down too, what you do will make little difference. But in case they're undecided and wavering, it surely is important that we don't give them any unnecessary excuses for action.

Ed is really doing very well in light of the magnitude of his operation. I went out to see him several days ago and we had a good talk. His spirit and his guts are pure Murrow. We discussed Viet-Nam and he asked me to send you his warmest regards.

Sincerely yours,

Donald M. Wilson³

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret; Eyes Only.

² Not found.

³ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

200. Memorandum From the Special Assistant in the
Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (Neubert) to the Assistant
Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)¹

Washington, October 18, 1963.

SUBJECT

Maintaining Momentum in our Vietnam Policy

Although I am sure I am telling you nothing new, I thought it might be worthwhile to set down some of the evidence that we are heading into a period of considerable difficulty in maintaining cohesion and momentum in our policy toward the GVN. It is all very well for us to assert that all Washington agencies are now agreed upon a policy of graduated pressure on the GVN designed to obtain: 1) continuing progress in war effort, 2) improvement in the GVN's popular support, and 3) improvement in relations between the US and the GVN. At the same time we must—and do—recognize that these objectives are to a considerable extent mutually incompatible, and not necessarily likely to be achieved by the measures available to us. In addition to this, despite protestations of unity, the interests of State, CIA and the Pentagon are necessarily disparate.

As I see it, it is quite clear that the first serious problem confronting us here in Washington as we attempt to pursue a policy that really satisfies no one is going to arise with CIA. John McCone expressed at some length and reportedly with considerable vigor at the day before yesterday's (October 16) Special Group (CI)² the view that we are going to have “an explosion” in Vietnam in the very near future. I am not sure precisely what McCone had in mind, but I imagine that he was asserting for the record one of his familiar “visceral” feelings. These, as we know, are sometimes right (Soviet missiles in Cuba) and sometimes wrong (ChiCom major attack on India), but I also think there is more to his present view than this. I suspect he is quite legitimately concerned about the likelihood we will be able to continue a successful war effort (in which his agency is to some extent involved) while at the same time, we are holding up economic aid as well as in effect encouraging political uncertainty in the GVN. The original McNamara/Taylor horseback opinion of how long it would be before the GVN felt the economic squeeze was two to four months. McCone may be arguing that the

cumulative effect of political-economic unease will bring things to a head in much shorter order. As a further speculation, I would suggest that he may think that the development of an explosive situation is unlikely to redound to our benefit, that an alternative government acceptable and useful to us is unlikely to arise, and that the communist Viet Cong is in the best position to exploit the chaos that could ensue.

[1 paragraph (15 lines) and handwritten marginal notation not declassified]

In sum, I believe we can expect McCone now to argue that the consequences of our present course are going to be unhelpful in the extreme and that we should, therefore, edge quite rapidly back toward what might be described as our policy toward Vietnam before last August.

I do not see any signs that the Pentagon has yet reached similar conclusions. In view of the military responsibility for getting on with the war, however, I would be astonished if they were not impressed by the line of reasoning I would expect McCone to advance.

I conclude that we may have rapidly increasing difficulty in inducing the rest of the town to live with the untidiness that we at least have fully expected to accompany pursuit of our present policy. Unless we can effectively refute the argument that our present course is trending toward "an explosion", we are going to have to assert with some considerable confidence that such an explosion is to our benefit. Perhaps all we can hope to do now is to hold the line at least until Lodge gets back here for consultation. It may be that what he has in mind is some positive thinking on ways in which we can, in fact, insure that any "explosion" is exploitable to our advantage.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam. Secret.

² No record of this meeting has been found.

201. Memorandum From the Director of the Vietnam Working Group (Kattenburg) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)¹

Washington, October 18, 1963.

SUBJECT

Department of Defense Release on Numbers of U.S. Military Personnel and Withdrawal of 1,000 Military Personnel in November

Problem:

The Department of Defense has referred to the Department of State a proposed release (Tab A)² on plans to withdraw 1,000 U.S. military personnel from the Republic of Vietnam beginning in November. The release also states that as of October 30 there will be 16,730 U.S. military personnel in Viet-Nam.

Discussion:

This will be the first time that the Defense Department will have officially announced a total figure for U.S. military personnel in South Viet-Nam, although high U.S. Government officials, including the President and Secretary McNamara, have made statements or given interviews on the record in which figures close to 15,000 have been used. The release, therefore, makes official what has more or less been official information for the last few months. The coupling of the figure on troop strength with the figure on withdrawal of military personnel is based on the view that speculation on the number of U.S. military personnel in South Viet-Nam is inevitable once the withdrawal of the 1,000 becomes known. Hence the desire on the part of the Defense Department to have an actual figure publicly available to which newsmen can be referred.

From a policy standpoint the official Department of Defense release poses a possible complication that may result from International Control Commission action. Under the terms of the Geneva Accord of 1954 the U.S. is not supposed to have more than 888 military advisers in South Viet-Nam. At the time the U.S. began its expanded military effort in South Viet-Nam in the fall of 1961, it was decided not to face this question directly, and U.S. troop strength was built up without making a figure publicly and officially available. Of course, statements made by the

President and the Secretary of Defense amount essentially to a public disclosure of the size of our troop strength, clearly indicating that we are well above the levels provided for in the Geneva Accord on Viet-Nam. However, the official Defense Department release may leave the ICC in Saigon with no alternative but to cite the U.S. for violation of the Geneva Accord and to call on the U.S. to withdraw all personnel in excess of the 888 permitted by the Accord.

Should the ICC take such action to cite the U.S., we could state publicly that, as already stated officially by the ICC in its Special Report of June, 1962,³ the authorities of North Viet-Nam are guilty of aggression against South Viet-Nam, and that stationing of U.S. military personnel in South Viet-Nam relates to a direct request from the Government of Viet-Nam of December, 1961, in which the GVN exercised its inherent right of self-defense. When North Vietnamese aggression against South Viet-Nam ceases, it will no longer be necessary for the U.S. to maintain large numbers of military personnel in South Viet-Nam.

Whatever our response we must anticipate that DRV propaganda will seek to make the most of the DOD announcement as a violation of the Geneva Accords. It is of interest to note in this connection, however, DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong's remarks in June, 1963, to De la Boissiere, retiring French Delegeue Generale in Hanoi, that U.S. forces in South Viet-Nam number 25,000-30,000 and that this number will increase. It is possible that the DRV will not go all-out to obtain condemnation of the U.S. by the ICC.

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Department of Defense release be approved and that we be prepared, should ICC action be forthcoming to cite the U.S. for violation of the Geneva Accords, to respond along the foregoing lines.

¹ Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, Honolulu Conf Nov 20 '63. Secret. A note on the source text reads: "Action was to be by leak to press."

² Not printed.

³ Special Report to the Cochairmen of the Geneva Conference on Indo-China, June 2, 1962; extract printed in *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1962*, pp. 1103-1106.

202. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 19, 1963, 1 p.m.

748. Eyes only Secretary; exclusive for Felt. Deptel 558² requested TF Saigon evaluation on continuing basis of US actions bring pressure on GVN (Deptel 534). Following assessments reflect combined judgment of Task Force.

1.

General. To date there have been no clear indications that US actions have had an adverse effect on war effort either in military or economic spheres. People in countryside largely unaware of recent developments in US-GVN relations or if aware do not feel these developments affect their lives directly. Among educated classes in urban areas general aura of unrest and discontent persists beneath surface. Most significant psychological reaction understandably taking place among business community (US, Vietnamese, Chinese and other foreign businessmen) in Saigon/Cholon area. We have received increasing number reports businessmen worried over suspension CI program and its effect on price structure and over possible cut-off of US aid. Price of gold has increased sharply. Other businessmen seeking unload large sums plasters at 120 to dollar or find investments yielding hard currency return (see Embtel 715 paragraph 7).³ Commodities and related trades primarily affected are sugar, flour, condensed milk, and cement. While reports still somewhat conflicting, concern in business community, and to certain extent in general public, has definitely deepened over past few days (see below).

Reaction by GVN to US measures continues in subterranean ways. We hear continued rumors, probably officially inspired, of plans for sacking Embassy and USIS. Times of Vietnam has continued its drumfire of articles strongly supporting GVN policies and attacking elements of US Mission allegedly opposing GVN by overt and covert means. Reports from various sources indicate GVN currently engaged in planning belt-tightening measures.

2.

Economic. Key prices of imports during week reversed pattern and took long-expected rise. Most important were sweetened condensed milk (by up to 10 percent, depending on brand), wheat flour (33 percent), and cement (30 percent), as well as chemical products, some iron and steel products in shortest supply, and miscellaneous manufactured imports.

Failure to rise previously in spite of expected shortages was reportedly GVN-inspired belief procurement authorizations would be issued mid-October. Trade sources report there had been some quiet speculative buying. Now canned milk and flour harder to find, and GVN limiting marketing of last flour shipments and is expected do same with coming milk arrivals. Thus, though supplies otherwise adequate till January, appears speculators have started create artificial shortages now. In case of cement, price rise can be explained in part as normal seasonal fluctuation, as end of rains allow resumption building; recent rise brings price only to official level.

Wholesale rice price also rose 8 percent since September 24, following 47,000-ton sale Philippines, 38,000 tons of which was from private stocks. GVN required exporters deliver equal amount no. 1 rice to security stock, creating pressure on market.

Rise key items touched off rise some other prices, particularly foodstuffs, even though no shortage was imminent.

Two commercial banks report rise in demand deposits, no change in loans, which difficult explain. Black market rate on plaster climbed 15 percent to 128, and there is speculation in gold.

In sum, impact on GVN of economic pressures to date has not resulted in request by Diem to see Ambassador, although Thuan has told Ambassador that Diem worried. Further time needed for pressures to take effect and pressures should be continued until point where they likely result in severe economic dislocation. There are no firm indications that Diem/Nhu will back down in face continued pressure.

3. Assistance to Vietnamese Special Forces. Thuan and Gen Don personally advised on 17 Oct⁴ that MAP and/or CIA support of RVNAF Airborne Ranger companies, Civilian Airborne Ranger companies and Civil Guard companies, presently under control of Vietnamese Special Forces (Col. Tung), will be withheld unless these units placed under operational control of JGS and committed to

operations. COMUSMACV letter to President Diem of 18 Oct⁵ advised him of same. Col. Tung will be personally notified when he returns to Saigon.

4. Military. In addition to continuation of pressures which have been underway for some time the following specific actions have been taken on military side with results as indicated:
 - a. Previously proposed and recently re-emphasized suggestion to relocate corps boundaries in order to place greater emphasis in Delta has (with minor modification) been adopted by President Diem and will become effective 1 November.
 - b. Previously proposed suggestion to place Vietnamese Special Forces elements operating in various corps areas under the operational control of corps commanders has been adopted by Gen Don and JGS Directive promulgated.
 - c. USMACV J-3 and Gen Don have made country wide tour visiting all corps and cmd with view to determining [garble—what?] measures required; to place greater emphasis in Delta; to stimulate increase in operational tempo in all areas; and to accomplish other directed actions. These measures will be subject of another COMUSMACV letter to President Diem.

5.

Political. In general there have been no favorable developments on various measures we would like see adopted in political area. Diem/Nhu have reacted to pressure by digging in more deeply and attempted exert discreet counter pressure on their own. On resumption of normal university life, University of Hue has reopened except for medical faculty which expected open this week; however, student attendance from 60-70 percent and general atmosphere at University remains sullen. No firm information when University of Saigon may reopen. Appears that GVN now attempting assess whether students actually will attend classes in sufficient numbers to give appearance of normalcy.

GVN general position re Buddhists is that Buddhist issue solved. While over one hundred Buddhist bonzes and faithful released from jail in Hue recently, many remain under detention including two leading bonzes who negotiated joint communique of June 16 and ranking lay leader. Such actions taken by GVN to date can be interpreted as moves on GVN part to demonstrate Buddhist problem solved rather than as concessions to Buddhists. Also, some indication that GVN will not move quickly to repeal or modify Decree Law 10. In meantime Buddhist faithful staying away from pagodas through fear of

government reprisals. In sum, GVN appears believe any previous concessions to Buddhists under US pressure are interpreted by Buddhist leadership as weakness and further concessions not warranted and self-defeating.

Nothing significant to report re land reform. Similarly few recent indications (if any) re specific re-emphasis of political aspects of Strategic Hamlet Program, which would be geared in any event to tempo of construction and development of strategic hamlets. Hamlet elections are proceeding as hamlets built and organized. Self-help projects and economic follow-on assistance in development phase are receiving good reception by hamlet populace. Concrete benefits can be expected to result in progressive identification of hamlet populace with the government at least on local level.

GVN has not abandoned extreme police measures and shows no inclination do so in immediate future. Night arrests continue although on reduced scale. Similarly, no action has been taken by GVN to restore civil liberties. On contrary, actions to date seem designed to impress any potential oppositionists among educated classes that they can not count on any guarantees of civil liberties and are at mercy of security organs of the regime.

With regard to refurbishing GVN image through broadening of government, etc; no concrete actions have been taken. Rumors persist that Diem will announce Cabinet changes and realignment certain government functions. However, should this occur it likely to be mere window dressing since most unlikely Diem now contemplates any action which might undermine power position and solidarity of Ngo family. While we cannot discount possibility of Cabinet shuffle for optical purposes, we see no signs that any reduction of influence of the Nhus is in the offing. In fact, harassment of Americans both through newspaper attacks, arrests of Embassy and USOM local employees, and general freeze on normal contacts between Americans and their Vietnamese counterparts would indicate that family still believes it has strong cards to play.

At this juncture little prospect for public and official statement by Diem before National Assembly setting new tone for government. Diem's speech on October 7⁶ characterized by ambiguous position toward US, a call for self-sufficiency with xenophobic overtones, a catalogue of national accomplishments, and an effort to blame negative factors on Communists and other machinations from outside SVN.

6. US/GVN relations. No general improvement has been noted in GVN campaign of divisive press attacks on CIA, USIS, Embassy, etc. Recent trend is to place blame on US Government rather than singling out specific agencies. While campaign waxes and wanes, major thrust is still one of confrontation with US policy as GVN wishes to interpret it.

GVN appears to have focused on paragraph in White House statement of October 3⁷ on seriousness of political situation as indication US will continue apply pressure for political changes which they not prepared grant. We believe US program of pressures has put Diem/Nhu off-balance and they attempting assess strength of US resolve; however too early judge ultimate outcome and significant indications as [of] a change of attitude may not appear for some time.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Top Secret. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 6:56 a.m. and passed to the White House, CIA, and Office of the Secretary of Defense.

² Dated October 10, not printed. (*Ibid.*)

³ In paragraph 7 of telegram 715 from Saigon, October 16, the Embassy reported it received calls from two "panicky" Chinese businessmen in Saigon who wanted to unload 6 and 20 million plasters, respectively. (*Ibid.*, POL 2 S VIET)

⁴ See [Document 198](#).

⁵ The letter is dated October 19. (Washington National Records Center, RG 334, MAC/V Files: FRC 69 A 702, 204-58 Organization Planning Files-Establishment of and Changes in Organization (1963))

⁶ An analysis, summary, and selection from Diem's speech of October 7 before the opening session of the third Legislature of the National Assembly was transmitted in telegram 654 from Saigon, October 7. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET)

⁷ Statement by McNamara and Taylor, October 2; for text, see *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1963*, pp. 874-875.

203. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 19, 1963, 2 p.m.

745. CINCPAC/POLAD exclusive for Admiral Felt. Secretary Thuan sought me out at a reception Friday evening.² When we were seated off to one side, he said:

"The President wanted me to ask you whether Washington had reached any decision regarding resumption of commercial imports."

He then continued without a pause, but with a pleasant smile on his face:

"And I told him I believed they had not. Is that right?"

After I said that as far as I knew no decision had been reached, he said, again with a broad grin on his face:

"That's what I thought and told the President. I will tell him that that's what you think."

After a few desultory remarks I said that I had great hope that the time would come when I would be able to show by my actions the strong feelings of friendship which I have for Viet-Nam. He said:

"I have faith that all of this is going to work out so that your mission will be a great success. I don't know how or when but I think it will be soon."

He then asked me what I thought about the statements Madame Nhu was making on her trip. Before I had even a chance to answer he said:

"Why does she have to say such things as her remark that all the people around President Kennedy are pink?"

I said that I did not know but the one thing I was sure of was that in a country like the United States where public opinion counts for so much, it is a very serious matter when two persons as prominent as Mr.

and Mrs. Nhu get such consistently bad publicity. It was for this reason that I had advised that they drop out of sight for a while and simply be quiet. It was evident they had not taken my advice but I felt it was all too clear that my advice has been good.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, FT 1 S VIET Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 4:24 a.m. and passed to the White House at 4:45 a.m.

² October 18.

204. Memorandum From Michael V. Forrestal of the
National Security Council Staff to the President's Special
Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, October 21, 1963.

SUBJECT

Nhu's Interview in *Times of Vietnam*

I attach FBIS 06 on an interview with Counselor Nhu published in the government controlled press of Vietnam on Saturday. It is obviously addressed to us, and I think the President would be interested in it.

You will note that I have marked a passage on the second page where Nhu is trying to thrust responsibility for deciding whether the UN team² should see Tri Quang on us. A cable has gone out to the Embassy telling them that we want the reverse to happen.³

The UN team is due to arrive next Wednesday the 23rd and stay approximately two weeks. The question has arisen whether we wish to have Lodge out there for the entire two weeks, in which case he would not be free to come back to Washington until the end of the week November 4-9. My inclination is that it is probably more important for him to come here soon in view of the growing political effects of our aid cut off (see page 6 of today's CIB).⁴ If he left Saigon on Wednesday next (October 30th), he would be here at the end of that week or for the week end and would have spent a week in Saigon while the UN team was there. I have a cable coming over from State for clearance suggesting some dates to Lodge.⁵

Mike

[Attachment]

Foreign Broadcast Information Service Text of *Times of Vietnam* Interview With Ngo Diem Nhu

Saigon, October 19, 1963.

Political Counsellor Ngo Dinh Nhu said Thursday⁶ that the Vietnamese people have lost their confidence in the U.S. Government. The Counsellor made the statement in an interview with visiting foreign newsmen. He said he could not understand why the United States has "initiated a process of disintegration at a time when we are winning. People here are wondering what the United States is doing. There is an atmosphere at [of] distrust. People have lost confidence in the United States."

He said: "Whether it is under this government or under some other government, the confidence between the Vietnamese people and the American government has been lost."

He said that arrested Buddhist leaders claimed "a half dozen" U.S. intelligence agency agents and employees of American "civilian" agencies in Vietnam had urged them to stage a coup d'etat and had incited Buddhists to commit suicide. "Some of the bonzes (Buddhist priests) in detention have freely revealed that some CIA agents encouraged them. Their stories check so well that they cannot be untrue. The bonzes have named a half dozen CIA agents plus some other employees of American civilian government agencies here. Some of these people are still here. Some have gone. Day and night they urged the bonzes to stage a coup against the government," the Counsellor told newsmen.

He said he could not understand why these CIA agents got involved in the Buddhist affair since he and the CIA officials had been working marvelously together in what many have termed the "winning program"—the strategic hamlet program—and that McCone himself had understood the need and meaning of that program. "I do not know whether they had received instructions from their higher-ups, but I must say that until this Buddhist affair broke out, the CIA had played an important part in making this winning program a success," he said.

Asked why these CIA agents worked against him, Counsellor Nhu said: "I do not know. Maybe they had received orders to do it against their will and judgment." These agents were not from the Army, he emphasized.

He told the correspondents: "The trust which has existed between Vietnam and America has ceased to exist now. This is true also of relations between the United States and the whole of the underdeveloped world. For us in Vietnam, it will be difficult to go up the hill again (an apparent reference to the possibility of improvement in U.S.-Vietnamese relations in the future). The Vietnamese Government will need much

wisdom to recover from what has been done in the past few months. I do not see what U.S. policy is at this stage."

Counsellor Nhu referred to these troubles as "this whole mess in Vietnam," and said American public opinion appeared to be trying to make "scapegoats" out of himself and the CIA for it.

The Counsellor pointed out in the interview that an abrupt, sharp cut in U.S. aid to Vietnam would have grave consequences in the economy as well as in the military effort, especially if such a cut is decided unilaterally. "To me, aid should be reduced progressively and by agreement between the two governments. This is something to be expected because American aid to us is something that cannot go on forever," he said.

Any sudden reduction of aid would place the Vietnamese Government in such a position as to be forced to make deep and drastic changes, stronger measures to more quickly bring about economic development, curb privileges, and promote more social justice, he explained. Such a drastic policy would involve changing everything, he added.

He said he did not understand why, since the U.S. AID normally releases funds in advance without waiting for congressional approval, it now is waiting for Congress to approve such funds. "There are two main effects so far," the Counsellor said. "The first one is to compel the Vietnamese Government to use its reserves of foreign currencies and the second is to bring about black market and its consequences. That leads to a poisoning of the situation and no doubt brings its adverse effects to the war effort ."⁷

Now if for one reason or another this aid is reduced, we shall have to do what the Communists have done. The Counsellor also referred to the solution of Algeria, which has been nationalizing major industries. Nhu said he personally believed the system of U.S. aid here should be changed to a lend-lease type whereby the Vietnamese Government would repay the United States for military equipment and other necessities. "It (the lend-lease type program) would preserve our dignity and make us more conscious of our obligation."

He added: "The other advantage would be that the United States would not be morally involved in the situation." He also said the U.S. withdrawal from Laos had frightened nationalist opponents of the Vietnamese and convinced them to cooperate with the government in

fighting the Communists. "I do not think U.S. policy is to withdraw from Vietnam as from Laos, but I detect a wavering," the Counsellor said.

Asked whether the Vietnamese Government would object to the U.N. fact-finding mission talking privately with the "bonzes" being held at the U.S. Embassy, the Counsellor replied that, first of all, that would be the responsibility of the U.S. Embassy. "The responsibility rests with the United States, this responsibility we don't want the United States to throw on us. We want the American government to take the full responsibility in this case, he said.⁸

Asked if the Vietnamese Government would present evidence of CIA involvement in the Buddhist affair to the U.N. fact-finding team, the Counsellor said that the government will do everything it can to avoid washing dirty linen between America and Vietnam in public, unless the American Government decides to kill us through the intermediary role of this U.N. commission."

(Editor's Note: Accounts of this interview have not yet been monitored from Saigon radio nor have any appeared in the vernacular press or the Vietnam press bulletin.)

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous.

² On October 12, the President of the General Assembly announced that a mission composed of the Permanent Representatives of Afghanistan, Ceylon, Costa Rica, Dahomey, Morocco, and Nepal and Brazil's Ambassador to Canada would travel to South Vietnam to investigate relations between the Government of the Republic of Vietnam and the Buddhist community. (Telegram 1338 from USUN, October 13; Department of State, Central Files, SOC 14-1 S VIET-UN)

³ Telegram 603 to Saigon, October 19. (*Ibid.*, SOC 12-1 S VIET)

⁴ Combined Intelligence Bulletin, not found.

⁵ Not found.

⁶ October 17.

⁷ Ellipsis in the source text.

⁸ Forrestal sidelined this paragraph.

205. Editorial Note

On October 22, 1963, the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Thomas L. Hughes, sent Secretary Rusk research memorandum RFE-90, entitled "Statistics on the War Effort in South Vietnam Show Unfavorable Trends." The abstract of the paper reads as follows:

"Statistics on the insurgency in South Vietnam, although neither thoroughly trustworthy nor entirely satisfactory as criteria, indicate an unfavorable shift in the military balance. Since July 1963, the trend in Viet Cong casualties, weapons losses, and defections has been downward while the number of Viet Cong armed attacks and other incidents has been upward. Comparison with earlier periods suggests that the military position of the government of Vietnam may have been set back to the point it occupied six months to a year ago. These trends coincide in time with the sharp deterioration of the political situation. At the same time, even without the Buddhist issue and the attending government crisis, it is possible that the Diem regime would have been unable to maintain the favorable trends of previous periods in the face of the accelerated Viet Cong effort." (Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam, JCS Comments on RFE-90, 11/4/63)

Lyndon Johnson, in *The Vantage Point*, page 62, wrote that in December 1963 he read "a review of the military situation developed by the State Department's intelligence analysts. The report concluded that the military effort had been deteriorating in important ways for several months." Apparently Johnson was referring to RFE-90. A copy is in the Johnson Library, Vice President's Security Files, Government Agencies, Department of State Intelligence Reports. For the complete text of RFE-90, see *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Book 12, pages 579-589.

For a subsequent Department of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff exchange of views on RFE-90, see [Document 306](#).

206. Telegram From the Army Attache in Vietnam (Jones) to the Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Department of the Army¹

Saigon, October 22, 1963.

Initialed by Hilsman. There is no time of transmission on the source text.

SGN 199 (ARMA C-390). 1. Night 20 October highly reliable Lt colonel US Army was contacted by two long-time Vietnamese acquaintances, and a third person, a Colonel Nguyen Khuong, presently unassigned and attached to RVNAF JGS. (See 704 INTC DET report AA990511 dated 30 August 1963.)²

2. Khuong asked if source believed US/press/military reports that war would be won by 1965? Also, had he (source) wondered why ARVN units failed to attack/press their advantage/kill more VC? Khuong stated RVNAF has the equipment, knowledge and ability to win but doesn't want to win and will not win war so long as present government remains in power. Khuong added, if things continue unchanged VC will win by 1965, VC now in phase III (change from company to battalion-size units) and building up to phase IV (heavy weapons/artillery for shift to VC divisions and final assault).

3. Khuong then came to point: A small, powerful group military officers who can control sufficient forces are prepared to launch a coup against Diem government. He outlined how they can assassinate Diem almost at will, replace corrupt/incompetent military, cabinet, and province officials, prosecute the war against VC, recall political refugees from France/USA, and establish a new government. While this group fears Diem, they especially fear Mr. Nhu who they consider will surely succeed Diem and who will seek reunification of North and South Vietnam through neutralist solution.

4. Khuong, realizing his own conspirators' lives are at stake if compromised, stated there were four ARVN generals and at least six colonels involved. Partial list included: Maj Gen Duong Van "Big" Minh, Brig Gen Le Van Nghiem (ex I Corps CG), Brig Gen Kim (assume Le Van Kim, close associate of Minh), Colonel Nguyen Van Thieu (CO 5th Inf Div), Colonel Pham Van Dong (IG III Corps), and Colonel Khuong.

5. Khuong is seeking assurance of US recognition and support following coup. If coup approach not acceptable alternate solution to establish radio station in some pro-US Asian nation such as Thailand, Korea, Philippines, from which an anti-government campaign could be directed.

Comments:

1. See R-3262-7, R-285-62 for bios on Colonel Khuong.³
2. Source is highly competent and in past completely reliable. He was surprised at being selected as contact man; however, his command of French, accessibility without undue chance of exposure, and his access to senior US officials are logical, possible reasons.
3. Fourth general officer unknown; however, based on discussions with source following are not involved: Major Gen Don (in past Minh, Kim and Don formed close threesome), Brig Gen Khanh, Dinh, Cao (CG II, III, and IV Corps).
4. CAS states Colonel Khuong has been associated with numerous previous coup groupings.
5. Contents this message brought attention Acting DCM. Modified version this message with message number furnished CAS.

¹ Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, Coup South Vietnam. Secret; Noform.

² Not found.

³ Neither found.

207. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 23, 1963, 5 p.m.

768. Eyes only for President only, pass White House directly, no other distribution whatever. Herewith my weekly report pursuant to Deptel 576² for the week ending Wednesday, October 23.

Question 1: Are we gaining or losing on balance and day by day in the contest with the Viet Cong?

Answer: A. There appears to have been no significant change in the last week on a day-by-day basis. But a thoroughly responsive answer to this question requires one to strike a balance between a multiplicity of often contradictory military, political, social and economic "facts"—any one of which can be used to prove almost anything.

B. To strike a balance, the word "victory" must first be defined. How do we know when we have won? My definition is: a condition in which large numbers of Viet Cong surrender (as their counterparts did in Malaya) and others simply don't report for duty anymore. All that would then remain would be sporadic banditry which the regular police forces could handle.

C. This condition would be reached when, to use Mao Tse Tung's figure of speech, there is no longer friendly water in which the Viet Cong's fish can swim. In the condition the people no longer like the Viet Cong, no longer want to see them around, no longer give them food or information.

D. The people come to feel this way, first, because the farmer feels safe and is not being shot at; and then because his government does not oppress him with burdensome taxes and forced labor; because he is making a good living; because he thinks his strategic hamlet is a good place in which to live, with enough food, with a school, with a dispensary, with the beginnings of local democracy; because he has learned how to control rats and insects and how to produce hogs; because his fishing is better.

E. Favorable factors towards bringing the above about are:

F. First and foremost is the work of the U.S. and Vietnamese military which is not only the hope for future victory, but is today a tremendous obstacle to total Viet Cong domination of the country. This result is being achieved at a much lower cost than would be the case if we were to do it alone, as the French tried to do. We are also doing much on long-range economic and social programs which should have lasting value. The strategic hamlet idea too is most constructive. While many of the hamlets are not up to standard, there are undoubtedly some which are really good in an all-around way, that is, they are not merely little armed camps where people are given a chance to defend themselves, but true communities which appeal to the whole man and which also have dependable sources of military support from outside. Vice President Tho said there are only 15 to 20 such all-around hamlets in the area south of Saigon which are really good. Let us hope this is low. Finally it can also be said that the rice crop is moving into the city regularly.

G. Unfavorable factors:

H. This is after all a pacification effort which really cannot be considered successful as long as one cannot drive as much around the country as one could two years ago and so long as gunfire can still be clearly heard from Saigon. Then there are not only no mass surrenders; on the contrary, the Viet Cong is always up to strength and is, in fact, reckoned at a higher figure than it was two years ago, even though it is often said that 24,000 Viet Cong have been killed during that period. The hatred of the government continues to be an incentive for young men to join the Viet Cong. And, this hatred is sure to have harmful effects on the Army. In fact, there are signs that it has already tended to diminish the Army's vigor, enthusiasm and enterprise. The rumors that the Generals are being paid off with money and with flashy cars, which are much in evidence, are believable. Finally, the report of the Delta Subcommittee of the Committee on Province Rehabilitation, which includes representatives of MAAG, MACV, USOM, USIS, CAS, and Embassy, dated October 14,³ specifically says: that the Delta situation is serious; that it gives cause for concern; that while our side has ample resources, it is making unsatisfactory progress, but that the Viet Cong are gaining.

I. Unless there is a change in government therefore, it would appear that the hatred is bound to grow. Also, the existing political control over troop movements, which prevents optimum use of the Army, would be

bound to continue. And, therefore, when it comes to defeating the Viet Cong, time is not working for us as long as the government is run by brother Nhu in the way in which he is now doing it.

J. All this could be quickly changed. But present circumstances compel me to say that in the contest with the Viet Cong, we at present are not doing much more than holding our own.

K. We have done and are doing big things in Viet-Nam which are changing the country basically for the better. In the forefront is the intelligent, courageous, and selfless leadership of the U.S. military which is bold yet practical and is in the best American tradition. There is the excellent economic and social work of USOM. We are, by all these means, producing an instrument which, if properly used by the Government of Viet-Nam, would bring victory. But at present the GVN's main preoccupation with protecting its own internal power structure seems greater than its preoccupation with victory over the Viet Cong. And the Viet Cong is developing.

Question 2: Is the government responding at any point to our threefold need for improvement in (a) campaign against VC, (b) internal political developments and (c) actions affecting relations with American people and government?

Answer: A. Under (a) General Harkins reports that "in no case has Government of Viet-Nam flatly resisted recommended improvements".

Under (b) there has been no significant improvement in internal political situation during past week. GVN engaged in extensive security sweeps and arrests of student leaders to prevent demonstrations during visit of UNGA delegations. All evidence to date points to concentrated GVN attempt to cow potential adverse witnesses and prevent their appearing before the delegation and to keep delegation busy on a cook's tour. Great interest in UNGA delegation among educated Vietnamese coupled with a general belief that GVN will not permit delegation to function freely. GVN reacted strongly against my approach concerning UNGA delegations access to Tri Quang. Rumors abound of further student agitation, more self-immolations during delegation's visit, and GVN-inspected attacks against Embassy and USIS.

B. But I am nonetheless sure our actions under Deptel 534 are producing results. For one thing, Thuan told me that Diem was worried and Diem directed Thuan to ask me on October 19 whether Washington had

reached any decision on commercial imports.⁴ Then experienced observers believe that our actions are creating favorable conditions for a coup. Although I as yet see no one who looks as though he means business in this regard, General Don has said he was impressed by commercial import suspension and said that our action regarding Colonel Tung was "one of the best things" we had done. See also CAS Saigon 1896.⁵

C. While I cannot prove it, I believe our actions are making Diem and Nhu much more careful about repressive measures-at least about getting caught. I also believe our actions under Deptel 534 constitute the first time that the U.S. has sought to discharge its moral responsibility for the behavior of this government, which surely would not stay in office without us. This is understood and appreciated and has attracted attention.

D. My present thought is that we should continue with this suspension at least until Madame Nhu's trip is over and at least until the GVN has dipped into their foreign exchange reserves. We should stop short of an economic crisis which causes a popular outbreak.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Top Secret; Eyes Only. Received at 10:44 a.m. and passed to the White House at 12:55 p.m.

² Document 195.

³ Not found.

⁴ See [Document 203](#).

⁵ According to CIA telegram 1896 from Saigon, October 23, General Don contacted Conein on October 23 to inform him that the Generals' coup committee planned to take advantage of the presence of its members in Saigon during the October 26 national holiday to stage a coup within the week. Don was concerned about a conversation he had with Harkins on October 22. Harkins reamed of the Generals' plans because a member of Don's staff, Colonel Khuong, had contacted a MACV officer and asked for support of the coup and recognition of the new government. Harkins had told Don that it was the wrong time to stage a coup because the war against the Viet Cong was progressing well. To make matters worse, Don said that Diem had reamed of Khuong's approach and had extended the assignment of two key divisions outside the Saigon area.

The coup leaders had planned on these units supporting the coup in Saigon. Don repudiated Khuong and told Conein that he would be disciplined by the coup committee. Conein challenged Don to produce proof that a coup committee existed. Don promised to turn over plans for political organization to Ambassador Lodge on October 24. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, CIA Reports) General Don, in *Our Endless War*, p. 98, discusses both the October 22 conversation between Don and Harkins, which Don recalls took place at a British Embassy party, and the October 23 meeting between Conein and Don.

208. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 23, 1963, 7 p.m.

770. Eyes only for Secretary Rusk. Pass eyes only Secretary McNamara and McCone. CINCPAC exclusive for Admiral Felt.

1. As follow-up to approach reported in Embtel 731,² Richard Stilwell and [*less than 1 line not declassified*] met Col. Le Quang Tung, Chief of Vietnamese Special Forces, at the latter's headquarters in Saigon on the afternoon October 21, 1963. During most of the meeting the Vietnamese Special Forces Chief of Staff, Major Le Quang Trieu, who is Tung's brother, was also present. The purpose for the meeting was explained to Colonel Tung in approximately the same manner as was the case with Secretary Thuan. Tung claimed to be unaware of the previous approach to Secretary Thuan³ and of the letter on this subject which had been sent by General Harkins to President Diem.⁴
2. Col. Tung reacted strongly to the statement that Special Forces would no longer be supported unless they are subordinated to the direct, effective control of the JGS. He claimed Special Forces are already under such control and that he "renders account" to the JGS of the movements of all his companies. It was pointed out that this was not satisfactory; that the US Govt desired unity of command whereby Special Forces come under the direct control of the JGS in order to maximize their impact on the conduct of the war. Somewhat heatedly, Col. Tung stated that while there were certain intelligence functions of his troops on which he reported directly to the Presidency and Counselor Nhu, all other dispositions of his units are undertaken with an "ordre de mission" issued by the Joint General Staff.
3. Col. Tung then asked if this same control applied to the civilian Airborne Ranger or if the Civil Guard companies [*less than 1 line not declassified*]. Tung replied that it was necessary to distinguish between military and paramilitary forces, that while these latter forces were under the general control of JGS, they were used in a more flexible manner as was agreed [*less than 1 line not declassified*] from the beginning.
4. [*less than 1 line not declassified*] repeated that the civilian Airborne Ranger companies could not be supported unless subordinated to JGS control. In anger, Tung retorted that if [*1 line not declassified*], he

would dissolve them. When asked if he could do this of his own authority, he admitted that he would have to get an order from the Presidency to do so. Tung was questioned if he would rather dissolve the civilian Rangers than place them under ARVN control. Gen. Stilwell indicated that there are MAP spaces for three additional Special Forces companies and possibly these civilian Airborne Ranger companies could be converted to ARVN units. In a cooler vein Col. Tung stated that ARVN recruitment might be possible if they would volunteer. He followed this by insisting that the civilian Ranger companies as well as the ARVN Ranger companies are under JGS control.

5. After some further discussion, Tung was reminded that Gen. Stilwell and the *[less than 1 line not declassified]* were under the instructions of their government, that if there is some misunderstanding as to control of the Special Forces units, this is possibly a matter which the President would wish to take up with Ambassador Lodge. This was later reiterated and it is believed Tung understood that JGS control is not a matter for negotiation.
6. Under the provisions of Deptel 570⁵ Tung was also told that support of the mountain scout and border surveillance units has passed *[less than 1 line not declassified]* to MACV. Gen. Stilwell indicated that henceforth, payments would be made through MACV/ Special Forces mechanisms and that he would arrange a get-together between his staff and Col. Tung's staff. Tung appeared to accept this in good grace.
7. Payments to civilian Airborne Rangers are now suspended until evidence available they subordinated to JGS control.
8. Stilwell advised Gen. Don of conversation with Secretary Thuan on October 17. In a subsequent conference on October 22, Gen. Don informed Stilwell that JGS was developing modus operandi for assumption of control over VNSF and for deployment of companies to field.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET Top Secret; Priority; Eyes Only. Received at 8:21 a.m. Repeated to CINCPAC. Passed to Defense, CIA, and the White House.

² Document 198.

³ See [Document 195](#).

⁴ See [footnote 5, Document 202](#).

⁵ See footnote 8, Document 198.

III. The Coup Against the Diem Government, October 23-
November 2, 1963: Differing Interpretations of U.S. Policy Toward
Coup Plotting, Efforts To Obtain Information on a Potential
Coup, Lodge-Diem Discussions, U.S. Assessments of a Coup, The
Coup, The Deaths of Nhu and Diem

[209. Editorial Note](#)

[210. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in
Saigon to the Agency](#)

Saigon, October 24, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Flash.
The source text is the copy sent to the Department of State. Also repeated
Flash to the Director of NSA and USIB agencies. There is no time of
transmission from Saigon on the source text, but it was received in the
Department of State at 3:23 a.m.

[211. Telegram From the President's Special Assistant for National
Security Affairs \(Bundy\) to the Ambassador in Vietnam \(Lodge\)
and the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
\(Harkins\)](#)

Washington, October 24, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, Coup South Vietnam. Secret;
Eyes Only.

[212. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Under
Secretary of State for Political Affairs \(Harriman\) and Michael V.
Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff](#)

Washington, October 24, 1963—10:30 a.m.

Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations.
Transcribed by Mildred Leatherman of Harriman's staff.

213. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)

Saigon, October 24, 1963—2:46 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to CINCPAC exclusive for Felt. Received at the Pentagon at 3:27 p.m. Passed to the White House for Bundy; the Department of State for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman; and to the CIA for McCone and Colby

214. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)

Saigon, October 24, 1963—6:55 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only; Exclusive. Repeated exclusive to Felt. Received at the Pentagon at 3:35 p.m. Sent for information to the White House for Bundy; to the Department of State for Rusk, Harriman, and Hilsman; and to the CIA for McCone and Colby.

215. Editorial Note

216. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)

Saigon, October 25, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, CIA Reports. Top Secret; Immediate. Sent from the CIA Station in Saigon to the Director of Central Intelligence as [document number not declassified]. Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, pp. 590-591.

[217. Telegram From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs \(Bundy\) to the Ambassador in Vietnam \(Lodge\)](#)

Washington, October 25, 1963—6:29 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, CIA Reports. Also addressed to Harkins. Sent via CIA channels to Saigon. Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, p. 592.

[218. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, October 25, 1963—9:54 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, PER-LODGE, HENRY CABOT. Top Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Kattenburg and Mendenhall, cleared with Rice and McGeorge Bundy (in draft), and approved by Ball. Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD exclusive for Felt.

[219. Letter From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam \(Harkins\) to the Ambassador in Vietnam \(Lodge\)](#)

Saigon, October 26, 1963.

Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 84, Saigon Embassy Files: FRC 68 A 5159, SGN 963, 19 GVN. A copy was sent to CINCPAC.

[220. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, October 28, 1963, 18 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret.
Received at 9:06 a.m. and passed to the White House, CIA, and Office of the Secretary of Defense.

221. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, October 28, 1963, 9 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 8 S VIET-US. Secret; Priority. Also sent to Bangkok. Received at 12:48 p.m. and passed to the White House, CIA, and Office of the Secretary of Defense.

222. Memorandum for the Record by the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (Krulak)

Washington, October 28, 1963.

Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers. Secret.

223. Memorandum From the Director of the Vietnam Working Group (Kattenburg) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, October 28, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, Pol 27-10 Rpts, 1963. Secret. Drafted by Montgomery and initialed by Kattenburg and Hilsman.

224. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Department of State

Saigon, October 28, 1963—6:57 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2003 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Department of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; and repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms.

[225. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam \(Lodge\) to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, October 29, 1963—2:54 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2023 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 4:23 a.m.

[226. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam \(Lodge\) to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, October 29, 1963—18:40 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is CIA Station telegram [document number not declassified] from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Department of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 7:59 a.m.

227. Telegram From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) to the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins)

Washington, October 29, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Top Secret Cables, October 1963 (B). Top Secret; Eyes Only. The telegram is a compilation of documents prepared for the White House; there is no time of transmission on the source text.

228. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Department of State

Saigon, October 29, 1963—6:30 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is CIA Station telegram [document number not declassified] from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Department of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 8:11 a.m.

229. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Department of State

Saigon, October 29, 1963—18:39 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2041 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Department of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; and repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 9:25 a.m.

230. Paper Prepared for the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, October 29, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam, 10/1/63-10/10/63 and undated. Top Secret. No drafting information is given on the source text. The paper was apparently prepared in anticipation of the meeting on the coup at 4 p m.; see Document 234. There are notes on the source text apparently in Hilsman's handwriting indicating that Harriman, U. Alexis Johnson, Ball, Sullivan, and Hilsman met at 2:20 and 3:20, perhaps to refine these talking points.

231. Briefing Paper

Washington, October 29, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam, 10/1/63-10/31/63 and undated. Top Secret. No drafting information is given on the source text, but initials on an earlier draft indicate it was prepared for Rusk, Harriman, U. Alexis Johnson, and Mendenhall. (Ibid.)

232. Briefing Paper Prepared in the White House

Washington, October 29, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. On a draft of this paper, McGeorge Bundy wrote the following note: "Should we cool off the whole enterprise[?]" (Ibid., Vietnam, Memos and Miscellaneous)

233. Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President

Washington, October 29, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, McGeorge Bundy Files, Memos for the President.

[234. Memorandum of Conference With President Kennedy](#)

Washington, October 29, 1963—4:20 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. The meeting was held in the White House. Another record of this conference, drafted by Mendenhall, is *ibid.*, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam, White House Meetings, State Memcons. In *To Move a Nation*, Hilsman gives a detailed description of this meeting, pp. 518-519.

[235. Memorandum of a Conference With President Kennedy](#)

Washington, October 29, 1963, 18 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. The meeting was held in the White House.

[236. Telegram From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs \(Bundy\) to the Ambassador in Vietnam \(Lodge\)](#)

Washington, October 29, 1963—7:22 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret. The source text is CIA telegram [document number not declassified] sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; and repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt. Also printed in *Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition*, vol. 11, pp. 782-783.

237. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency to the Station in Saigon

Washington, October 29, 1963—9:21 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret. The source text is CIA telegram [document number not declassified] sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; and to Honolulu eyes only for Felt. Received at the Department of State at 11:34 p.m.

238. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Department of State

Saigon, October 30, 1963—11:55 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2060 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy and to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy. Repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 12:15 a.m.

239. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, October 30, 1963, 9 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, FT 1 S VIET. Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution. Received at 2:39 a.m. and passed to the White House at 4:50 a.m.

240. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)

Saigon, October 30, 1963, 4 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State and Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to Bangkok for Felt. Attached to the source text was a signed note from Krulak to McGeorge Bundy stating that Taylor asked that this message, which had been shown only to McNamara at Defense, should be conveyed to Bundy. Also printed in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, Vol. 11, pp. 784-785.

241. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, October 30, 1963—4:45 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, AID (US) S VIET. Secret; Limit Distribution. Received at 6:30 a.m. and passed to the White House at 7:35 a.m.

242. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Department of State

Saigon, October 30, 1963—6:30 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Top Secret; Flash; Eyes Only. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2063 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy and repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 7:16 a.m. Also printed in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, Vol. 11, pp. 789-792.

243. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Department of State

Saigon, October 30, 1963—6:30 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIEI Top Secret; Immediate. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2077 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; and repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 10:50 a.m.

244. Memorandum From the Director of the Vietnam Working Group (Kattenburg) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, October 30, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries-Vietnam. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Initialed by both Kattenburg and Hilsman.

245. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, October 30, 1963, 5 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Top Secret. Received at 12:32 p.m. and passed to the White House at 12:45 p.m.

246. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)

Saigon, October 30, 1963—6:30 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State and Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Attached to the source text was a signed note from Krulak to McGeorge Bundy stating that Taylor asked that this message, which had been shown only to McNamara, be conveyed to Bundy. Also printed in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, Vol. 11, pp. 785-787.

247. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)

Saigon, October 30, 1963, 7 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State and Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to Bangkok for Felt. Attached to the source text was a signed note from Krulak to McGeorge Bundy stating that Taylor asked that this message, which had been shown only to McNamara, be conveyed to Bundy.

248. Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)

Washington, October 30, 1963—12:25 p.m.

Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Dolores P Perruso of Harriman's staff.

249. Telegram From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)

Washington, October 30, 1963—5:49 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Flash; Eyes only. The source text is CAS telegram [document number not declassified] to Saigon. Repeated to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy;

to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes; to Honolulu eyes only for Felt; and to the CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, pp. 604-605.

[250. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam \(Lodge\) to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, October 31, 1963—5:40 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2114 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 9:33 a.m.

[251. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam \(Harkins\) to the Director of the National Security Agency \(Blake\)](#)

Saigon, November 1, 1963—2:24 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Flash. The source text is the copy sent for information Flash to the Department of State. Also sent for information Flash to USIB agencies. Received at the Department of State at 1:44 a.m.

[252. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Director of the National Security Agency \(Blake\)](#)

Saigon, November 1, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret Flash. The source text is the copy sent for information Flash to the Department

of State. Also sent for information Flash to USIB agencies. Received at the Department of State at 2:34 a.m.

253. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, November 1, 1963, 3 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIEI Confidential; Flash. Repeated Flash to CINCPAC. Received at 2:15 a.m. and passed to the White House, CIA, Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the Defense Intelligence Agency at 3:20 a.m.

254. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Department of State

Saigon, November 1, 1963, 1 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Sent eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Received at the Department of State at 3:18 a.m. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for Bundy; and repeated to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms and to Honolulu and Hong Kong eyes only for Felt.

255. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, November 1, 1963-4 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Confidential; Flash. Repeated Flash to CINCPAC. Received at the Department of State at 3:19 a.m. and passed to the White House at 3:25 a.m. and to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and CIA at 3:39 a.m.

256. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Director of the National Security Agency_(Blake)

Saigon, November 1, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Flash. The source text is the copy sent for information Flash to the Department of State. Also sent Flash to USIB agencies. Received at the Department of State at 3:40 a.m.

257. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Director of the National Security Agency_(Blake)

Saigon, November 1, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Flash. The source text is the copy sent for information Flash to the Department of State. Also sent Flash to USIB agencies. Received at the Department of State at 3:55 a.m.

258. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Director of the National Security Agency_(Blake)

Saigon, November 1, 1963, 5 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Flash. The source text is the copy sent for information Flash to the Department of State. Also sent Flash to USIB agencies. Received at the Department of State at 4:11 a.m.

259. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, November 1, 1963, 6 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Flash; Limit Distribution. Received at the Department of State at 5:11 a.m. and

passed to the White House, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and CIA at 5:31 a.m. Printed in part in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 3, pp. 57-58.

[260. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Director of the National Security Agency_\(Blake\)](#)

Saigon, November 1, 1963—6:53 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Flash. The source text is the copy sent Flash to the Department of State. Also sent Flash to USIB agencies. Received at the Department of State at 6:08 a.m.

[261. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, November 1, 1963, 5 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET. Secret; Priority. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 7:26 a.m. and passed to the White House at 8:35 a.m.

[262. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, November 1, 1963, 3 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, SOC 14-1 S VIET/UN. Secret; Priority. Received at 9:18 a.m. and passed to the White House at 9:37 a.m. William Colby, in Honorable Men, p. 215, describes this cable and notes that because it was sent only priority, it arrived in Washington well after the coup had begun.

[263. Memorandum for the Record of Discussion at the Daily White House Staff Meeting](#)

Washington, November 1, 1963, 8 a.m.

Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by W.Y Smith.

[264. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, November 1, 1963—10:50 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Flash. Drafted by Hilsman and Sullivan, cleared by the White House, and approved by Rusk. At 10 a.m., President Kennedy met with his principal advisers: Rusk, McNamara, McCone, Robert Kennedy, Taylor, Harriman, Hilsman, McGeorge Bundy, Robert Manning, Colby, Krulak, Forrestal, and Kline. Many had been awake most of the night following the coup developments as the reports came into Washington. During the meeting, which is described as "Off the Record," the President attended Holy Trinity Church's All Saints Mass from 10:55 to 11:29 a.m. Kennedy then returned to the meeting which had continued without him. The President and his advisers met until 12:15 p.m. (Kennedy Library, President's Appointment Book) No other substantive record of this meeting has been found. Both Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, p. 301, and Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 519, recall being awakened early on the morning of November 1 to follow the coup situation. Taylor states that Kennedy received the news of Diem's death at this meeting when, in fact, he received the news at the 9:35-10:05 a.m. meeting on November 2; see Document 274. Telegram 673 was apparently drafted before the 10 a.m. meeting.

[265. Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and Senator J. William Fulbright](#)

Washington, November 1, 1963—12:01 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 190, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Phyllis D. Bernau. Rusk left the meeting at the White House at 11:05 a.m. and returned to the Department of State.

(Johnson Library, Rusk Appointment Book) Senator Fulbright was Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

[266. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, November 1, 1963—12:04 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Flash; Eyes Only. Drafted by Hilsman and McGeorge Bundy and approved by Rusk. Apparently drafted before the 10 a.m. meeting at the White House; see footnote 1, Document 264.

[267. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam \(Harkins\) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff \(Taylor\)](#)

Saigon, November 1, 1963—6:25 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Exclusive; Eyes Only. Repeated to CINCPAC. The source text is the copy sent by the JCS to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. The telegram was also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy. Received at the Department of State at 2:35 p.m.

[268. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, November 1, 1963—6:53 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Koren; cleared by McGeorge and William Bundy and Harriman; and approved by Hilsman and Rusk.

[269. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, November 1, 1963—8:47 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET Secret; Flash. The text of this message was received from the White House for transmission as a Department of State telegram. Cleared by McGeorge and William Bundy and Rusk and approved by Hilsman.

270. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, November 2, 1963, noon.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret; Flash. Received at 11:38 p.m. and passed to the White House at 11:42 a.m.

271. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, November 2, 1963—2:50 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIEI Secret; Flash. Drafted by Koren and cleared with Harriman and Forrestal.

272. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Saigon, November 2, 1963, 6 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Priority. The source text is the copy sent for information priority to the Department of State and received at 5:05 a.m. Also repeated for information priority to CINCPAC and the White House.

273. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, November 2, 1963, 8 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Received at 8:45 a.m. and passed to the White House at 9:28 a.m.

274. Editorial Note

275. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)

Saigon, November 2, 1963—10:42 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Exclusive; Eyes Only. Repeated for information to Felt, CINCPAC, the White House exclusive for Bundy, CIA exclusive for McCone, and the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. The source text is the Department of State copy; it was received at 10:07 a.m.

276. Telegram From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) to the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins)

Washington, November 2, 1963—12:25 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Eyes Only. Also sent to Felt. Repeated for information to Generals LeMay, Wheeler, and Shoup and Admiral McDonald; to the Department of State for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman; to the White House for Bundy; to the JCS for Admiral Riley and Krulak; and to the Department of Defense for McNamara, Gilpatric, and William Bundy.

277. Circular Telegram From the Department of State to All Diplomatic Posts

Washington, November 2, 1963—5:49 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 16 S VIET. Secret; Priority. Drafted by Hilsman, cleared with McGeorge Bundy, and approved by Rusk.

278. Telegram From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)

Washington, November 2, 1963—6:31 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET Secret; Eyes Only. Sent via CIA channels. Repeated for information to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, and to the CIA eyes only for McCone. The source text is the Department of State copy.

209. Editorial Note

In CIA telegram [*document number not declassified*] from Saigon, October 23, 1963, Lodge reported that he had talked with Harkins on the afternoon of October 23 about the U.S. approach to coup planning against Diem. Harkins confirmed that in his conversation with General Don on October 22 he had warned Don of Colonel Khuong's approach to one of his Military Assistance Command officers. (See [Document 206](#).) According to Lodge, Harkins stated. that his purpose in offering Don the warning was to discourage Vietnamese military officers from approaching U.S. officers on political matters. Lodge stated that he reminded Harkins of the guidance on coup planning that Washington had sent. ([Document 192](#)) Harkins responded, according to Lodge, that he understood this guidance to mean that the United States did not favor a coup. Lodge countered as follows:

“I explained that while it was true that the USG did not desire to initiate a coup, we had instructions from the highest levels not to thwart any change of government which gives promises of increasing the effectiveness of the military effort, insuring popular support to win the war, and improving working relations with the U.S. General Harkins expressed regret if he had inadvertently upset any delicate arrangements in progress and added that he would inform General Don that his remarks of 22 October did not convey official USG thinking.” (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, CIA Reports; ellipsis in the text of the telegram)

Don was understandably concerned about the differing signals on coup planning which he was receiving from Harkins and Conein. He arranged to meet Conein on the night of October 23 and during the discussion expressed his worries to Conein. Don stated that Harkins' discouragement of a coup during the discussion of October 22 seemed contrary to Conein's desire to know more about the coup committee's planning. Conein assured Don that Harkins' remarks had been inadvertent and were actually contrary to a Presidential guidance from Washington. Conein asked again for detailed plans of the coup. (CIA telegram [*document number not declassified*] from Saigon, undated; Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, CIA Reports, and Don, *Our Endless War*, page 98)

210. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, October 24, 1963.

Critic [1]. 1. Highly reliable source reports coup imminent led by Lt. Col. Pham Ngoc Thao. Originally scheduled 1300 hrs 24 Oct but Major Nguyen Van Tu, CO 8th Rgt who leading five battalions unable to get transport and now commandeering trucks and busses. 5th Paratroop Btn commanded by Ngo Quang Trnong in Saigon and participating but had no ammo but being supplied now. Target is Gia Long Palace to overthrow Diem. Col. Le Nguyen Khang, Marine Brigade CO, and Colonel Nguyen Van Thieu, 5th Division CO, promise remain neutral. Khang indicated may give support later. In event initial assault fails troops will withdraw. Air Force led by Lt. Col. Nguyen Cao Ky will bomb Palace followed by renewed troop assault. Lawyer Nguyen Huu Duong seizing Civic Action, Information, and Radio Vietnam with five hundred students plus part of Tu's force. Following first attack coup group will broadcast from Radio Vietnam or from auxiliary transmitter at Civic Action if necessary.

2. Source unhappily working with Duong and fears preparations incomplete and coup may fall apart en route.²

3. Station believes above insufficient to succeed but may trigger other units. Also believe likely source unwitting full scope military support as he claims no armor involved whereas Thao and Huynh Van Lang have claimed armor as key to their plans.

4. Ambassador has been briefed.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Flash. The source text is the copy sent to the Department of State. Also repeated Flash to the Director of NSA and USIB agencies. There is no time of transmission from Saigon on the source text, but it was received in the Department of State at 3:23 a.m.

² In Critic 2 from Saigon, the Station reported it had contacted Pham Ngoc Thao at 3 p.m. local time at his home. Thao disclaimed any

knowledge of a coup scheduled for that day or the next few days. In Critic 3, the Station reported that Colonel Nguyen Cao Ky was still drinking beer with American officers at 3 p.m. local time on October 24. These developments and other checks caused the CIA Station to conclude in Critic 4 from Saigon, that either the original report of the coup was false or action had been delayed or aborted. (All October 24; *ibid.*) An account of Critic telegrams 1 to 4 is in the President's Intelligence Checklist, October 24; (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Chester V. Clifton Series)

211. Telegram From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) and the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins)¹

Washington, October 24, 1963.

[document number not declassified] 1. Saigon 1896.² [2 document numbers not declassified]³ and your recent Critics have been considered at highest levels. We wish to reaffirm instructions contained CAS 74228⁴ and within their context we have the following comments for your consideration.

2. Certain aspects of the Don-Conein contacts give us considerable concern. Don's reference (1) to a Presidential directive and to a scheduled meeting with Amb Lodge, for which there was no basis, (2) the lack of information regarding Don's real backing, and (3) the lack of evidence that any real capabilities for action have been developed, all lead us to wonder whether there may be danger Nhu attempting entrapment through Don's approaches to Conein.

3. We wonder whether it is wise to risk continued involvement of Conein in the dialogue with Don, since not only might it destroy his usefulness, but might also involve you and General Harkins in an operation which is difficult to deny. Is it possible to arrange a more secure system of contacts with General Don and others in the military, perhaps through cut-outs. We do feel quite strongly that you and Gen Harkins should stand back from any non-essential involvement in these matters. CAS septel makes other technical suggestions.⁵

4. We also need urgently your personal assessment of Don's own status, the group he represents, and whatever plans they may have for the future. Considering all these factors, it seems wise to maintain close control over meetings between Don and Conein.

¹ Source: Department of State, Har-Van Files, Coup South Vietnam. Secret; Eyes Only.

² See [footnote 5, Document 207.](#)

³ Reference is to two CIA telegrams from Saigon described in [Document 209](#).

⁴ Document 192.

⁵ CIA telegram [*document number not declassified*] to Saigon, dated October 24. (Department of State, Har-Van Files, Coup South Vietnam)

212. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff¹

Washington, October 24, 1963—10:30 a.m.

Governor called Mr. Forrestal re Zablocki.² He said Zablocki was not told what our policy was. Mr. Forrestal said our policy became public a day after it was made. Governor said he didn't know anything about withholding of aid from units. Mr. Forrestal said that only happened day before yesterday. Governor said it was only in the press day before yesterday but policy agreed to a long time ago.³ Governor said he was not complaining about the earlier orders but he has to have a green light to tell him exactly ⁴ Mr. Forrestal said he thinks he should be brought up to date now that he is here in Washington. Governor referred to the report which Z will bring out.⁵ Mr. Forrestal said he hopes he will write about the way the war is going. The other most delicate situation. Trying to improve the policies and personnel of that government. Hope he won't say anything in his report that would make it more difficult for us to accomplish this. One thing that would make it difficult would be to have a whitewash of the regime. Mr. Forrestal said it could be gently pointed out to Z that the suspension of aid was something that was done back in August-stopped commodity import program; this became public knowledge no later than first of September; Mr. Forrestal thought Z knew this before he went out. On the troops, Mr. F said, this is a somewhat different thing. Governor said Z was very much concerned that cutting aid off from troops might affect war effort. Governor said he didn't know whether he could talk to Z today; has luncheon and war games in afternoon and leaving city in the morning. Mr. Forrestal asked whether someone else might do it. Governor said perhaps Roger could and he said he would talk to Roger about it.

Governor said he is concerned about Harkins' action. He would like to talk to Forrestal and Bundy about it next week. Forrestal said trying to get two messages out this morning. Governor said we should try to get our ducks in row before Lodge arrives.

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Mildred Leatherman of Harriman's staff.

² See [footnote 8, Document 181](#).

³ On October 22, Robert J. McCloskey, Deputy Director, Office of News, read the following statement to the press:

“The U.S. Government has informed the Government of Viet-Nam that U.S. support will no longer be provided to those elements of the special forces which are not committed to field operations or engaged in related training programs. This action is in line with President Kennedy's statement on September 12 that 'What helps to win the war we support. What interferes with the war effort we oppose.' ” (*American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1963*, p. 877)

The reference to the President's September 12 statement is to a reply to a question at a news conference. For complete text of the answer, see *ibid.*, pp. 873-874.

⁴ Ellipsis in the source text.

⁵ H. Rept. 893, 88th Cong., 1st Sess., November 7, 1963.

213. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Saigon, October 24, 1963—2:46 p.m.

MAC 1991. Yesterday I had long conversation with Sec Thuan re the topics included in your letter to the President² and asked if he had anything concrete to report. He said he would give me periodic reports as and if changes occur. I suggested that I see the President personally to discuss some of the items. He agreed but said it would be next week because of preparations for the UN committee and the national holiday on the 26th. I am continuing my coverage of the Delta provinces. Spent this morning in Vinh Long and also with the new atmosphere the attitude of the 9th Div is bringing into the area. [*sic*]

Also spent yesterday in the new province of Han Nghia northeast of Saigon. Was very impressed with the Province Chief and the American advisory group. They have a fine attitude in tackling a real tough problem in an old VC stronghold. It really charges one's batteries to see these youngsters at work. They put in a full day-and chances are they'll be called to put out a VC fire almost every night.

New subject.

Just saw CAS 1896 to Washington.³ I was not in Bangkok as indicated in last para. And I did discuss message with the Ambassador apparently after it had been dispatched. In fact he indicated that my discussion with Don contravened our instructions on coup planning. I do not feel that I did. CAP 63560 dated 6 [5] Oct⁴ certainly spells out that policy and CAS Washington 74223 of 9 Oct⁵ gives additional thoughts.

In the past two weeks two different officers in the advisory detachments here in Saigon have been approached by Khuong asking if the U.S. would back a coup. Khuong did not discuss any details of any plan. When these U.S. officers came to me for guidance I told them to inform Col Khuong that the U.S. military are here to advise and support the people and the government in their fight against Communism-and it would be well if he, Col Khuong, would bend his efforts along that line.

I have never met Khuong. I have seen Don several times recently and at no time has he mentioned coup planning to me. Not that he would. In fact all our conversations have been along lines of furthering the war effort, ideas for carrying out some of your suggestions to Diem-and items I should put in another letter to Diem to continue plugging these ideas.

I told him not all of his officers had got the word and mentioned Khuong's approaches to two of my advisors. Don was surprised and told me he thought he had stopped all that. My purpose in this was to see if we couldn't avoid having advisors distracted by matters which are not in their domain and which only resulted in diverting them from their main effort as advisors.

CAS 1896 is the first indication to me since your visit that the Generals group was again in business. Though I am not trying to thwart a change in government, I think we should take a good hard look at the group's proposals to see if we think it would be capable of increasing the effectiveness of the military effort. There are so many coup groups making noises. Unless elements of all are included I'm afraid there will be a continuous effort to upset whoever gains control for sometime out and this to me will interfere with the war effort. Ambassador has seen.

Regards.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to CINCPAC exclusive for Felt. Received at the Pentagon at 3:27 p.m. Passed to the White House for Bundy; the Department of State for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman; and to the CIA for McCone and Colby

² Document 163.

³ See [footnote 5, Document 207](#).

⁴ Document 132.

⁵ Document 192.

214. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Saigon, October 24, 1963—6:55 p.m.

MAC 1993. Have just seen CAS Saigon [*document number not declassified*]² Copy received after dispatch. Apparently there is a discrepancy somewhere along the line. It appears the discrepancy is in how the interpretation of what was actually stated gets put down on paper.

This Gen Don agreed must be the case where [when] we talked last night. CAS Saigon [*document number not declassified*]² is another case in point. I did not mention any Presidential directive to Gen Don nor have I in any discussions with him. Nor did I say my statement was inadvertent. I did tell Don my reason for mentioning Col Khuong was indicated in my MAC 1991³ to avoid having advisors approached on matters that are not within their domain.

Gen Don asked to see me again this afternoon. He wanted to discuss further Col Khuong. I told him I had nothing further to discuss other than as stated above. I told Don that I would not discuss coups that were not my business though I had heard rumors of many.⁴ He agreed there were. He informed me Col Khuong had been sent to Dalat with his family for a vacation.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only; Exclusive. Repeated exclusive to Felt. Received at the Pentagon at 3:35 p.m. Sent for information to the White House for Bundy; to the Department of State for Rusk, Harriman, and Hilsman; and to the CIA for McCone and Colby.

² Reference is to the second CIA telegram described in [Document 209](#).

² Reference is to the second CIA telegram described in [Document 209](#).

³ *Supra*.

⁴ In telegram JCS 4137-63, October 25—8:45 a.m., Taylor informed Harkins:

“View here is that your actions in disengaging from the coup discussion were correct and that you should continue to avoid any involvement.”
(Department of State, Har-Van Files, Coup South Vietnam)

215. Editorial Note

According to CIA telegram [*document number not declassified*] from Saigon, October 25, 1963, Conein and Don met on the night of October 24. Don stated that he could not now hand over to Lodge the coup committee's plans for political organization as he had promised earlier. The coup committee opposed such a move for reasons of security, but, Don continued, the committee would be willing to show Lodge all their plans, both military and political, 2 days before the coup was to take place. Conein reminded Don that the U.S. Government could make no commitment to the coup leaders until it had studied their plans in detail. Don answered that the coup was planned for no later than November 2 and again promised at least 2 days' notice. Don assured Conein that the new Vietnamese government would be civilian, would free non-Communist political prisoners, would allow honest elections, and would permit complete religious freedom. The new government, Don added, would be pro-Western, but would not be a vassal of the United States. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, CIA Reports)

216. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)
to the President's Special Assistant for National Security
Affairs (Bundy)¹

Saigon, October 25, 1963.

1. I appreciate the concern expressed by you in Ref A² relative to the General Don/Conein relationship, and also the present lack of firm intelligence on the details of the Generals' plot. I hope that Ref B³ will assist in clearing up some of the doubts relative to the Generals' plans, and I am hopeful that the detailed plans promised for two days before the coup attempt will clear up any remaining doubts.
2. CAS has been punctilious in carrying out my instructions. I have personally approved each meeting between General Don and Conein who has carried out my orders in each instance explicitly. While I share your concern about the continued involvement of Conein in this matter, a suitable substitute for Conein as the principal contact is not presently available. Conein, as you know, is a friend of some eighteen years' standing with General Don, and General Don has expressed extreme reluctance to deal with anyone else. I do not believe the involvement of another American in close contact with the Generals would be productive. We are, however, considering the feasibility of a plan for the introduction of an additional officer as a cut-out between Conein and a designee of General Don for communication purposes only. This officer is completely unwitting of any details of past or present coup activities and will remain so.
3. With reference to General Harkins' comment to General Don [in] which Don reports to have referred to a Presidential directive and the proposal for a meeting with me, this may have served the useful purpose of allaying the Generals' fears as to our interest. If this were a provocation, the GVN could have assumed and manufactured any variations of the same theme. As a precautionary measure, however, I of course refused to see General Don. As to the lack of information as to General Don's real backing, and the lack of evidence that any real capabilities for action have been developed, Ref B provides only part of the answer. I feel sure that the reluctance of the Generals to provide the United States with full details of their plans at this time, is a reflection of their own sense of security and a lack of confidence that in the large American community present in Saigon their plans will not be prematurely revealed.

4. The best evidence available to the Embassy, which I grant you is not as complete as we would like it, is that General Don and the other Generals involved with him are seriously attempting to effect a change in the government. I do not believe that this is a provocation by Ngo Dinh Nhu, although we shall continue to assess the planning as well as possible. In the event that the coup aborts, or in the event that Nhu has masterminded a provocation, I believe that our involvement to date through Conein is still within the realm of plausible denial. CAS is perfectly prepared to have me disavow Conein at any time it may serve the national interest.
5. I welcome your reaffirming instructions contained in CAS Washington 74228.⁴ It is vital that we neither thwart a coup nor that we are even in a position where we do not know what is going on.
6. We should not thwart a coup for two reasons. First, it seems at least an even bet that the next government would not bungle and stumble as much as the present one has. Secondly, it is extremely unwise in the long range for us to pour cold water on attempts at a coup, particularly when they are just in their beginning states. We should remember that this is the only way in which the people in Vietnam can possibly get a change of government. Whenever we thwart attempts at a coup, as we have done in the past, we are incurring very long lasting resentments, we are assuming an undue responsibility for keeping the incumbents in office, and in general are setting ourselves in judgment over the affairs of Vietnam. Merely to keep in touch with this situation and a policy merely limited to "not thwarting," are courses both of which entail some risks but these are lesser risks than either thwarting all coups while they are stillborn or our not being informed of what is happening. All the above is totally distinct from not wanting U.S. military advisors to be distracted by matters which are not in their domain, with which I heartily agree. But obviously this does not conflict with a policy of not thwarting. In judging proposed coupe, we must consider the effect on the war effort. Certainly a succession of fights for control of the Government of Vietnam would interfere with the war effort. It must also be said that the war effort has been interfered with already by the incompetence of the present government and the uproar which this has caused.
7. General Don's intention to have no religious discrimination in a future government is commendable and I applaud his desire not to be "a vassal" of the U.S. But I do not think his promise of a democratic election is realistic. This country simply is not ready for that procedure. I would add two other requirements. First, that there be no wholesale purges of personnel in the government. Individuals who were particularly reprehensible could be dealt with later by the regular

legal process. Then I would suggest a cabinet covering a very broad range. This may be impractical, but I am thinking of a government which might include Tri Quang and which certainly should include men of the stature of Mr. Buu, the labor leader.

8. Copy to General Harkins.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, CIA Reports. Top Secret; Immediate. Sent from the CIA Station in Saigon to the Director of Central Intelligence as [*document number not declassified*]. Also printed in *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Book 12, pp. 590-591.

² Document 211.

³ See [Document 215](#).

⁴ Document 192.

217. Telegram From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)¹

Washington, October 25, 1963—6:29 p.m.

CAP 63590. Your 1964² most helpful. We will continue to be grateful for all additional information giving increased clarity to prospects of action by Don or others, and we look forward to discussing with you the whole question of control and cut-out on your return, always assuming that one of these D-days does not turn out to be real. We are particularly concerned about hazard that an unsuccessful coup, however carefully we avoid direct engagement, will be laid at our door by public opinion almost everywhere. Therefore, while sharing your view that we should not be in position of thwarting coup, we would like to have option of judging and warning on any plan with poor prospects of success. We recognize that this is a large order, but President wants you to know of our concern.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, CIA Reports. Also addressed to Harkins. Sent via CIA channels to Saigon. Also printed in *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Book 12, p. 592.

² Document 216.

218. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, October 25, 1963—9:54 p.m.

647. Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge. Your 776.² Diem's invitation to you may mean that he has finally decided to come to you. Pursuant tactics you have been following, you probably will wish leave initiative to him to see what he wants to raise with you. If opportunity which you judge appropriate is presented we hope you can explain our policy within context para 12 our 534.³ Objective, of course, is to see if there is any evidence Diem is moving in direction we desire and broader discussion may be helpful in probing his thinking. And if Diem seems unwilling to open subject we think you should seek means of moving conversation to these matters on your own if possible within context of your basic posture.

As you know, we wish to miss no opportunity to test prospect of constructive changes by Diem. One way or the other, we hope it will be practicable to raise some of following more immediate issues:

1. *Military Matters:*

- a). You might express satisfaction that previously proposed and recently reemphasized suggestion to remark corps boundaries, placing greater emphasis on Delta, has been adopted by President, as well as suggestion to place Special Forces elements operating in various Corps areas under operational control of Corps Commanders, which we understand has been subject JGS directive.
- b). You might also wish explain further along lines para 9 Deptel 534, and elaboration Deptel 570,⁴ reasons for our position that support must be withheld from those airborne ranger and Civil Guard companies not responsive to JGS control.
- c). With regard to military operations (as spelled out in JCS 2792, 051834Z)⁵ our view is that military operations should emphasize clear-and-hold instead of terrain sweeps of little permanent value; that there should be expansion of personnel in combat in all units to full authorized strength; and that training and arming of hamlet militia should take place at an accelerated rate, especially in the Delta.

- d). With regard to the strategic hamlet program, we believe a consolidation of this program in the Delta of special importance at this time, as well as action to ensure that future strategic hamlets not be built until they can be protected and until civic action programs can be introduced.
2. It is highly desirable GVN treat UN mission in manner which will insure that subsequent report, UN discussions and decision are as favorable as possible toward Republic Vietnam. This approach to mission requires that it be permitted access to all persons it desires to see. Also means that GVN should in its own interest avoid raising any matters with mission either directly or indirectly which could serve as pretext for UN members to deal with political issues relating to Vietnam such as reunification by elections, neutralization, etc.
3. GVN could serve its own interest while UN mission present in Vietnam by taking steps to release Buddhists and students remaining under arrest, reopening all schools still closed and initiating action in National Assembly for repeal Decree 10.
4. Anti-US public statements by GVN officials (like Nhu) and slanderous articles in GVN-controlled Times of Viet-Nam are poisoning atmosphere between US and GVN and make cooperation in pursuit of our effort increasingly difficult to maintain. This is particularly true in the light of the fact that the U.S. Government has been extremely careful in these last months to avoid this kind of comment with respect to GVN.

There may be other specific issues as well which you might find it appropriate to raise.

We realize of course that Diem's general mode of operation leaves little opportunity for his interlocutors to bring up matters not of interest to him, and that Diem may keep conversation strictly on plane of interest to him without bringing up any topics bearing on political relations between his government and US. But we repeat that we do not wish to lose any opportunity of pressing our position upon him, and this meeting looks like one of the best chances we have had.

Ball

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, PER-LODGE, HENRY CABOT. Top Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Kattenburg and Mendenhall, cleared with Rice and McGeorge Bundy (in draft), and approved by Ball. Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD exclusive for Felt.

² Not found.

³ Document 181.

⁴ See [footnote 3](#), [Document 198](#).

⁵ See [footnote 9](#), [Document 181](#).

219. Letter From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)¹

Saigon, October 26, 1963.

MACJ234

DEAR AMBASSADOR LODGE: I am increasingly concerned over the continued, and probably accelerating, utilization by the Viet Cong of Cambodian territory. Heavier and more sophisticated Sino/Soviet Bloc weapons are turning up in the Delta and elsewhere in RVN. History points up the indispensable role of neighboring friendly territories for resupply and communications points in connection with insurgent warfare. Mines, grenades and demolition charges are being detonated in the Republic of Vietnam filled with explosive materials brought in from Cambodia. Prisoner of War interrogations relate in considerable detail the activities and movements of VC personnel shuttling between Cambodia and RVN. The Watch Committee in Washington recently reaffirmed all this on 17 October 1963, stating in part, "that cumulative evidence . ² makes it clear that the Viet Cong are continuing to use Cambodian territory as a base of operations, sanctuary and support area."³

Accordingly, I feel that a new effort to control and as far as possible eliminate VC activity in Cambodia is mandatory. This would include closing off the infiltration pipeline, and shutting down the Viet Cong bases in Cambodia. Failure to take positive action in this respect could prolong the current war in the Republic of Vietnam.

Though I appreciate this is primarily a GVN-Cambodia issue, I feel there are some military measures that should be given consideration (we can assist in some) such as:

- a. Permit photo reconnaissance flights on the Cambodian side of the border.
- b. Relax current restrictions on clandestine intelligence operations across the border in Cambodia.
- c. Institute a "hot pursuit" policy authorizing ground forces in contact with the Viet Cong to pursue enemy units across the border. This

permission should extend to pursuit of Cambodian forces found violating RVN territory.

- d. Impose rigid inspectional controls on Cambodian use of the Mekong River in attempting to prevent the introduction of hostile personnel and contraband into the RVN.

One of our main difficulties has been the collection of hard intelligence, and implementation of the above should go a long way toward providing more of the answers, as well as contributing toward an improved operational situation.

In summary, I cannot help but be disturbed over the present situation in Cambodia from a military point of view. The flow of weapons and ammunition coming from there, and the continued VC use of that territory for recuperation, regroupment and resupply should not be permitted.

I appreciate that this is a difficult diplomatic task to accomplish. However, I feel we should continue in our efforts in the hope we can make some gain-even though small, in effecting more rigid control of the border.

Sincerely,

Paul D. Harkins⁴
General, United States Army

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 84, Saigon Embassy Files: FRC 68 A 5159, SGN 963, 19 GVN. A copy was sent to CINCPAC.

² Ellipsis in the source text.

³ The Watch Committee report of October 17 has not been found.

⁴ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

220. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 28, 1963, 18 p.m.

804. Eyes only Secretary Rusk.

1. On Monday² after the atomic energy lunch Thuan spoke to me about my day with Diem, inferring that he had been instrumental in arranging it. He said that Diem had had elaborate studies made about what steps they could take without our aid and all had concluded that without our aid they could not go on.
2. I told him that after a long and frustrating conversation in which not one single specific idea of mine had been accepted, I finally asked Diem if he could think of some one thing which was within the range of his possibilities, which he would be willing to do and which could reassure US public opinion. He had said nothing.
3. When Thuan asked what sort of thing I would want, I said that I could illustrate it by such things as liberating the prisoners (Buddhists and others); opening the schools; eliminating the discriminatory features of Decree Law No. 10; and concealing nothing from the UN Commission, so as to put Vietnam in a good light with regard to world opinion.
4. I said that the trouble between Vietnam and the United States was largely one of public relations. We are a government in which public opinion is extremely important. I realized that they were accustomed to an authoritarian government; still, two such different governments should be able to work together on specific matters.
5. I hoped that we could get this thing out of the papers for awhile, which is why I had advised that the Nhus disappear for awhile.
6. Thuan then said: Well, you don't ask for much, I must say. He added: Of course, the President must save face.
7. I said that nobody, not even the Americans, likes to be put in the position of supporting totalitarian acts which are totally contrary to our way of thinking.
8. He asked me whether he could say to President that without some step by GVN he felt sure American attitude would harden. I said that I would rather say that without some step by GVN he could see no change in present American attitude.

9. The conversation ended with Thuan saying that my conversation with President Diem was “perhaps a beginning”.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret. Received at 9:06 a.m. and passed to the White House, CIA, and Office of the Secretary of Defense.

² October 28.

221. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 28, 1963, 9 p.m.

805. Eyes only Secretary. Bangkok exclusive for Felt.

1. Herewith report of my day with President Diem, Sunday, October 27.
2. We left Saigon [garble—and flew?] to Phuoc Long from where we flew for about 20 minutes by helicopter to Dao Nghia Plantation Center where we had lunch. We then flew over the Province of Quang Duc to Dalat. Diem was at his best, describing the public improvements that he had put into effect. He was constantly saying, “I did this” and “I did that”. He appears deeply interested in agriculture and in developing the country. When we were in the helicopter, because of the noise, he was continually writing messages on a large block of paper describing what we were seeing. He is very likeable. One feels that he is a nice, good man who living a good life by his own lights, but who also feels that he is a man who is cut off from present, who is living in the past, who is truly indifferent to people as such and who is simply unbelievably stubborn.
3. After leaving Saigon, the President mentioned the fact that at one time UNESCO had planned to build another university in Vietnam. This gave me an opportunity to discuss the UN Commission. I asked him whether he had seen them. Diem said that he had. I said that I knew two members of it well and one slightly. I was sure that at least one of them was going to ask me to let him talk with Tri Quang. I said that my answer would be that I would not allow anyone to see Tri Quang without the request of the Government of Vietnam, but I strongly advised him to give his permission because it would help Vietnam in the United Nations if the Commission could say that he had at no time prevented them from seeing anything or talking to anybody whom they wanted. He said nothing but looked provoked. After a pause, he said that he supposed I knew that Tri Quang had been communicating with the outside world and that he had dropped some papers out the window onto the street. I said that I found this hard to believe because there were no windows in the room in which he was living and even if he went along the gallery to go to the men's room, he still was nowhere near the street.

4. After a sumptuous Vietnamese dinner, he suddenly stopped talking about the events of the past and said, in a casual rather supercilious tone, that he would like to know whether we were going to suspend the commercial imports payments or whether we were going to stop. He said it as though it were a matter of indifference to him. I had at no time brought this up or done anything to make it easy for him to do so.
5. I said I did not know, but asked what he intended to do if our policy did change. Would he open the schools, would he liberate the Buddhists and others who were in prison, would he eliminate the discriminatory features of Decree Law Number 10?
6. He said that the schools had been gradually opened, that they were all open in Hue, that the Buddhists were being liberated and that changing Decree Law 10 was very complicated and up to the Assembly, that he had no authority.
7. He then attacked American activities in Vietnam. He spoke particularly about an American [less than 1 line not declassified] who had talked to people in the Vietnamese Government about threats which had been made to assassinate me and that the 7th Fleet would come in if such a thing happened. He said that Communist documents had also been found discussing a coup on October 23 and 24 which also involved the 7th Fleet. He said that the assassination story had been started to poison my mind, that anyone who knew him knew that my safety was an essential preoccupation of his. I said I had total confidence that he did not want me to be assassinated, but that these rumors were constantly being brought to me. I also pointed out that there had been no coup on October 23 and 24.
8. He said that Mecklin, the head of USIS, was printing tracts against the government and giving equipment to opponents of the government so that they could print tracts and that the CIA was intriguing against the GVN.
9. I said: Give me proof of improper action by any employee of the US Government and I will see that he leaves Vietnam.
10. He then said that we must get on with the war against the Communists.
11. I said I agreed but we must consider US opinion; we wanted to be treated as equal partners; we do not want Vietnam to be a satellite of ours; nor do we want to be a satellite of Vietnam's. We do not wish to be put in the extremely embarrassing position of condoning totalitarian acts which are against our traditions and ideals. Repeatedly I asked him: What do you propose to do for us? His reply several times was either a blank stare or change of subject or the statement: "je ne vais pas servir", which makes no sense. He must have meant to say "ceder"

rather than “servir”, meaning: “I will not give in.” He warned that the Vietnamese people were strange people and could do odd things if they were resentful.

12. I said many things happen which made it hard for us. In our newspapers we read of newspapermen being beaten up (as they were on October 5),² of bonzes burning; of children being taken off to concentration points in US trucks.
13. He said newspapermen shouldn't go into the center of a riot, they could expect to get beaten.
14. I said you don't get anywhere in the US by beating up newspapermen. He said I will not give in.
15. I said you wanted us to do something for you, what can you do for us? Ours is a government of public opinion. Public opinion is already so critical that I thought that if the Church resolution came to a vote there would be too many votes against Vietnam. I was glad that it was arranged to leave the decision on aid to Vietnam up to the President. But the President himself could not fly in the face of a totally adverse public opinion and the bad publicity coming out of Vietnam could make it hard for the President.
16. He said the US press is full of lies. He then changed the subject and talked about the impropriety of our allowing former Ambassador Chuong to speak.
17. I said there was free speech in America and anybody could say whatever he wanted.
18. He said there was a practice against letting a former Ambassador attack his own country in the country in which he had been Ambassador. This is clearly something for which Vietnam could be indemnified (edommommageable).
19. He then spoke about brother Nhu who he said was so good and so quiet, so conciliatory and so compromising.
20. I said I would not debate this point and it might be that Mr. Nhu had been treated unfairly in the press of the world but a fact is a fact and the fact is that Mr. and Mrs. Nhu have had extremely bad publicity. This is why I had advised a period of silence for both of them. It is still hard for me to understand why Mrs. Nhu felt she had to talk so much.
21. He said she had had more than 100 invitations.
22. I said yes, but they had not come from the US Government.
23. He said the press does not print what Madame Nhu says. The whole concert of lies is orchestrated by the State Department.
24. I said the government does not control the press in America. It is basically a free commercial press. When there is something sensational to report, an American newspaper is going to report it or else it will

cease to be a newspaper. The way to stop the publicity is for Madame Nhu to stop talking.

25. He said that Ambassador Chuong's older daughter in Washington was "acting like a prostitute", that she "scandalized Georgetown" and "even jumped on priests". To this I made no comment.
26. Somewhat to my surprise he brought up the Times of Vietnam (which I had not done) and said that he realized that perhaps it had been a little bit inaccurate concerning the departure of Rufus Phillips which he understood was in fact due to the fact that his father was sick. I said that I was sure Phillips' father was sick, but I also said that the Times of Vietnam was constantly slandering the US, printing things which were totally untrue, such as the story the other day that [the Embassy?] allowed the American Congressional delegation and Secretary McNamara to visit Tri Quang. Neither of these things were true. But here again he would never admit any of my statements about the inaccuracy of the Times of Vietnam concerning the US.
27. At the end of the conversation he said with a sigh I realize I made a great mistake in leaving such a gap in Washington, meaning that if he had had another kind of Ambassador, the press and the politicians could have been cultivated so that Vietnam would not now find itself with such unfavorable public opinion.
28. When it was evident that the conversation was practically over, I said: Mr. President, every single specific suggestion which I have made, you have rejected. Isn't there some one thing you may think of that is within your capabilities to do and that would favorably impress US opinion. As on other previous occasions when I asked him similar questions, he gave me a blank look and changed the subject.
29. Although the conversation was frustrating and long-drawnout, the tone was always courteous and restrained. I am convinced that we have persuaded him of one thing: That the state of US opinion is very bad from his viewpoint. For a man who is as cut off as he is, this is something. Perhaps the conversation will give him food for thought and perhaps the conversation marks a beginning. But taken by itself, it does not offer much hope that it is going to change.
30. The US Government should, however, make up its mind as to what it would regard as an adequate action by the GVN on which to base a resumption of commercial imports. Thuan thinks we will be hearing from him again.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 8 S VIET-US. Secret; Priority. Also sent to Bangkok. Received at 12:48 p.m. and passed to the White House, CIA, and Office of the Secretary of Defense.

² While covering an act of self-immolation by a Buddhist bonze at the circle in front of the Saigon Market, three American news correspondents, John Starkey and Grant Wolfhill of NBC and David Halberstam of The New York Times, were attacked and beaten by plainclothes Vietnamese policemen who sought to prevent them from taking photographs of the suicide. (Telegram 637 from Saigon, October 5; *ibid.*, SOC 14-1 S VIET) See also Mecklin, *Mission in Torment*, pp. 242-243.

222. Memorandum for the Record by the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (Krulak)¹

Washington, October 28, 1963.

SUBJECT

Visit to Representative Zablocki

1. At the direction of General Taylor I called on Representative Zablocki to discuss his Vietnam visit.² He stated that his views would ultimately be expressed in writing but, in advance of the written report,³ that he would be glad to summarize them orally, generally as recounted below.
2. He began by saying that his group included several members who left the US with a preconception that the Diem regime must be liquidated, while others went to Vietnam with an open mind. All returned, after 3-1/2 days in-country, with about the same convictions; specifically that:
 - a. Diem, with all his faults, his autocracy, his tolerance of venality and brutality, is durable, and has been winning.
 - b. There is no visible substitute for Diem—at least none which guarantees improvement; thus, actions by US representatives to join with coup plotters, as was apparently true in August, is harmful.
 - c. The conduct of the resident US press is a grave reflection upon their entire profession. They are arrogant, emotional, unobjective and ill-informed. The case against them is best expressed by their having been repudiated by much of the responsible US press.
 - d. He has serious doubts as to the efficacy of our commodity import suspension, in that he fears it will shake the confidence of the common people, inspire inflation and affect the war effort adversely. He is, at the same time, in full sympathy with the suspensions related to the Vietnamese special forces.
 - e. He is favorably impressed with Ambassador Lodge; believes he is attacking a most difficult task with sincerity, tenacity and vigor. He is likewise favorably impressed with General Harkins and his energetic approach to winning the war. He spoke unfavorably concerning Trueheart and Mecklin, in terms of their defeatist and anti-Diemist attitudes, although he did not explain how he reached this judgement in such a brief time.

- f. He believes that intensified operations against North Vietnam are an essential to early termination of the war; that Ho Chi Minh's truce noises should be a signal for more pressure on him.
3. The Zablocki group visited the Delta and, by his account, were favorably impressed by the morale and enthusiasm of both the US and Vietnamese military. Someone had obviously told him of General Cao's tactical weaknesses, which he recounted accurately. He also observed that we should not lose sight, in our impatience to see the Delta war ended, that neither the French nor the Vietnamese had ever been able to establish much of a presence there; that it is indeed a hard problem.
4. At the end of the conversation—in which he did most of the talking—I noted that he had not mentioned the Buddhist problem. He then characterized it as a political matter, said we probably have as much religious discrimination in the US as there is in Vietnam, and compared the number of Roman Catholics in our own high government circles with the situation in Vietnam.
5. I asked if Mr. McNamara and General Taylor might have the favor of an advance copy of his report. He assented, but avoided saying when it might be complete. From remarks made by one of his secretaries I reached the conclusion that they are shooting for this weekend.

V.H. Krulak
Major General, USMC

¹ Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers. Secret.

² See [footnote 8, Document 181](#).

³ H. Rept. 893, 88th Cong., 1st Sess., November 7, 1963.

223. Memorandum From the Director of the Vietnam Working Group (Kattenburg) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)¹

Washington, October 28, 1963.

SUBJECT

Herbicide Operations in Viet-Nam

The attached telegram (Tab A)² provides a condensation of TF/Saigon's evaluation of defoliation and crop destruction operations in Viet-Nam. The full report is being pouched.³ The telegram concludes:

- 1) Chemical defoliation and crop destruction operations are effective weapons against the VC;
- 2) Present approval procedures are too cumbersome;
- 3) The psychological and civic action aspects of the operation are not particularly good. No one, for instance, has been reimbursed for accidental damage.

TF/Saigon asks for a basic Washington decision on whether or not herbicides are an effective tactical weapon against the VC. If the decision is in the affirmative TF/Saigon recommends that:

- 1) Authority to approve chemical crop destruction be delegated to Ambassador and COMUSMACV per guidelines in Deptel 1055 (Tab B)⁴ and
- 2)

Deptel 1055 be amended to allow wider use of herbicides;

TF/Saigon says it will seek to streamline request procedures and seek maximum US advisory assistance, particularly on the local level.

- 3) Authority for hand spray defoliation and crop destruction operations be decentralized to RVNAF advisors. Aerial spray will still be under control of the Ambassador and COMUSMACV.

I believe that we have sufficient evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of herbicide operations. It has been demonstrated that the cost in adverse

propaganda is relatively low. I agree that present approval procedures are too slow. I believe more effort should be made to improve the civic action aspects of this operation and that reimbursements for accidental damage should be paid promptly. More emphasis should be put on non-chemical defoliation.

I recommend that you sign the attached telegram.⁵

¹ Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, Pol 27-10 Rpts, 1963. Secret. Drafted by Montgomery and initialed by Kattenburg and Hilsman.

² Not attached; reference is to telegram 668 from Saigon, October 9. (*Ibid.*, Central Files, POL 27-10 S VIET)

³ The full report, "Evaluation of Herbicide Operations in the Republic of Vietnam (September 1962-September 1963)," was submitted on October 10 and approved by Harkins and Lodge. This 56-page report is in Washington National Records Center, RG 334, MACV Files: FRC 69 A 702, 204-58 Organization and Planning Files (1963).

⁴ vol. III, p. 274.

⁵ A handwritten note on the source text reads: "done by R[oger] H[ilsman], 11:30 a.m. on 10/31. Tel sent to S/S 10/31." The telegram has not been found.

224. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 28, 1963—6:57 p.m.

1. Addressees of this message are as suggested in CAS Washington [document number not declassified].²
2. At the airport 0700 Monday, leading GVN officials were gathered to say goodbye to President Diem, who was taking me off on a trip. General Don sought me out and asked me whether Conein was authorized to speak for me. I said that he was. Don then said that whatever was done must be thoroughly Vietnamese and that the U.S. should not interfere or try to stimulate a coup.
3. I said that I agreed; the U.S. wanted no satellites; we would not thwart. I asked how soon action could be expected. He said, we are not ready yet. He then added: Army has lost its drive (in French "allant"); we must win before you Americans leave. We cannot do it with this government, we must, therefore, get a government with which we can win now. I said keep me informed and let me see your plans.³
4. Unless you object, in the interests of maximum security, I propose to limit messages on this subject to myself and the CAS ACOS. Others will be given access on a strict need to know basis.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2003 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Department of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; and repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms.

² Not found.

³ Don, in *Our Endless War*, p. 98, recounts this airport conversation with Lodge in almost identical terms.

225. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 29, 1963—2:54 p.m.

1.

By prearrangement and at Gen Don's initiative, Col Conein met Gen Don
[*less than 1 line not declassified*] of 28 Oct. [*1 sentence (3 lines) not
declassified*]

[*Numbered paragraph 2 (2 lines) not declassified*]

3. Don stated that he had talked to Amb Lodge and that Lodge had
vouched for Conein.² Don emphasized that he had told Amb Lodge
that he and his group had no political ambitions, that their only
desire was to win the war against the VC and re-establish the prestige
of Vietnam and the Army. He stated flatly the only way to win before
the Americans leave in 1965 was to change the present regime. Don
indicated he was completely satisfied at Conein's bona fides as were
the other members of the Generals' coup committee.

4. Don added that he and his fellow Generals wished to do everything
possible to avoid American involvement in the coup. He stated
emphatically that other Americans should quit talking to Colonels and
Majors about coup action since in this way, Americans will involve
themselves despite any discretion on the part of the Generals. Conein
asked for specifics on this point. Don replied merely he recognized
Conein to be the proper contact on the American side and the
Americans should recognize him as the proper contact on the
Vietnamese side. All other dealings on the subject of coup action
between Americans and Vietnamese should cease. Don would not be
more specific.

5.

Explaining that he was speaking on his own initiative and without
instructions (this had previously been cleared with the Ambassador),
Conein called to Don's attention the fact that the Amb would be
leaving for a brief trip to the United States on 31 Oct, that it might
prove important both to Vietnamese and American considerations of
this question should Amb Lodge have a complete grasp of the

Generals' planning prior to his departure. Don repeated that Amb Lodge would have the plans before the coup but when pressed on his previous commitment to make these plans available 48 hours in advance, Don stated that possibly the plans could only be made available 4 hours in advance. Don questioned Conein closely as to what time on the 31st the Amb would be leaving. Don added that he hoped the Amb would not change his schedule, as any change might be suspect. Don stated nothing would be happening within the next 48 hours and that, if there was a good reason for the Amb to change his planning, the Amb would be informed in time to make his own decision. Don added that he would be leaving on the morning of 29 Oct to see Gen Do Cao Tri and General Nguyen Khanh, that the cover for this trip would be the distribution of medals. Actually, Don would be talking to Tri and Khanh to perfect the planning. Don asked Conein to remain at home from Wednesday³ evening onward.

[Numbered paragraph 6 (6 lines) not declassified]

7. Conein recalled to Don the latter's previous mention of Lt Col Pham Ngoc Thao. Don said to beware of Thao since he is not above fabrication and is suspect by the Generals' group. Don added that Thao is a protege of Ngo Dinh Thuc and Nhu, that likewise Thao is under suspicion by Col Do Mau, Chief of the MSS. Don added that even Gen Khanh is suspected by the President as not being entirely loyal.
8. Gen Don was again questioned about the participation of Gen Ton That Dinh in the coup planning. Don repeated that Dinh is not participating in the planning, that Dinh is under suspicion by Ngo Dinh Nhu, with whom Dinh argued while he was Military Governor of Saigon. Don reiterated that Gen Dinh is continuously surrounded by coup committee sympathizers and these persons have been given orders to eliminate Dinh if he shows any signs of compromising the coup.
9. Don was pressed to reveal details of the units participating in the coup. Don said that this was not his specific function within the coup committee and therefore he could not answer the question with precision. Don outlined his function as the contact man with the Americans, other Generals, and division commanders. Gen Le Van Kim is doing the political planning and the military planning is in the hands of others (*Comment:* presumably "Big Minh" himself). Of those units which he had knowledge he listed:
 - A. One half of the Airborne brigade (specific units not known to him).

- B. Two battalions of Marines (specific units unknown). Col Nguyen Khang, Marine CO, fears for his family and would lead the entire Marine Corps into the coup if he could be assured [of] the security of his family in case he is killed.
 - C. All of the Air Force with exception of its commander, Col Nguyen Huu Hien.
 - D. Some units of the Presidential Guard plus at least four tanks.
 - E. The entire 5th Division.
 - F. The 9th Division (Comment: now in the Delta) after the coup begins.
 - G. Entire 21st Division.
 - H. Half of the 23rd Division (specific regiments not known).
10. Gen Don said that he was unaware of the position of the 7th Division⁴ but did not know that neither the Navy nor the Special Forces are involved in any way. He said likewise the 135th Regiment was not involved. He indicated some possibility that the combat police and other elements of the National Police in Saigon might join in after the coup begins. He could not give an opinion with respect to the 46th and 48th Territorial Regiments. He emphasized that he was not doing the military planning.
11. Don volunteered that Gen Tran Thien Khiem was being very circumspect at the moment because he knows he is under suspicion by the President.
12. The only additional details that Don could offer were:
- A. Command post for the coup will be the JGS. This was chosen because of its proximity to Special Forces headquarters and Tan Son Nhut.
 - B. The Generals are aware that there are two underground tunnels of escape from Gia Long Palace. These terminate at the cemetery at the corner of Phung Khoc Khoan and Phan Thanh Gian and at the zoo. These were formerly part of the sewers but the sewerage has been diverted into other channels.
 - C. At the moment of the initiation of the coup, PTT will be taken and phones cut off.
13. In closing, Gen Don said that he would be in contact again within 48 hours, utilizing the new system outlined by Conein. He pleaded that the Amb not alert the American community in any way, specifically that Americans not be told to stock up on food since that would be an instant alert to the GVN.

*[Numbered paragraph 14 (1-1/2 lines) not declassified]*⁵

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2023 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 4:23 a.m.

² See [Document 224](#).

³ October 30.

⁴ In CIA Station telegram [*document number not declassified*] from Saigon, October 30, the position of the Seventh Division was corrected as follows: "A review of Conein's notes indicates that the coup group can count on two regiments of that division. This agrees with our prior estimate that the bulk of the Seventh can be counted on." (Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET)

⁵ In Don's brief account of this meeting with Conein, he states that Conein "offered us money and weapons, but I turned him down, saying that we still need only courage and conviction, which we abundantly had." (*Our Endless War*, pp. 98-99) According to the interim report of the Select Committee to Study Government Operations, Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders (Reps. 94-465, Senate, 94th Cong, 1st sess.), p. 222, Conein passed 3 million plasters (\$42,000) to an aide of Don's late on the morning of November 1 to procure food for the coup forces and to pay death benefits for those killed during the coup.

226. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)
to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 29, 1963—18:40 p.m.

1. I have reviewed the following factors which appear to me to be particularly relevant in a balanced examination of the positive and negative forces affecting the chances of a successful coup d'etat:
 - A. Of immediate concern is the apparent lack of detail furnished by General Don both with regard to the military units to be involved and the politico/psywar side. This appears to me to be at least in part explained by the Generals' reticence to reveal these details at this point and because of what must be a much greater regard for security than was the case in August. The Generals also acknowledge a certain amount of compartmentation and division of labor among the principals which on balance should work to our advantage.
 - B. The acknowledged involvement of General Dinh is an extremely variable factor. The Generals seem acutely aware of this and Don states that they have him under 24-hour a day surveillance and are prepared to neutralize him at any time should he kick over the traces.
 - C. The possibility of a premature, unrelated and precipitate coup by Col Pham Ngoc Thao or others looms large as a negative factor. Again, the Generals appear completely aware of this and as you know, we have never been particularly sanguine that Thao has this capability.
 - D. Knowledge of the involvement of certain civilian opposition elements, notably Bui Diem, who has stated that he is liaison between General Kim and civilian leaders, probably Dang Van Sung and Phan Huy Quat, represents both a positive and negative factor. On the negative side, it represents an extension of knowledge weakening the security element but on the positive side, it indicates an awareness of the necessity of civilian political inclusion and the fact that as Don has stated it is not intended to establish a military junta. Tran Trung Dung's knowledge and probable involvement despite his disclaimer, further indicates intention to form civilian government, probably within frame of reference of constitutional succession.

- E. I am disturbed over the reported discussion of Col Nguyen Khuong's approaches to U.S. military personnel without the authorization of the coup principals. It should be remembered that Khuong's role was obscure in the August coup activities. Don has stated that the coup principals would discipline Khuong and that he has been removed from the scene.
 - F. It would seem to me that the existence of an imminent coup atmosphere would reduce the element of surprise necessary for the successful implementation of a coup d'etat. This coup atmosphere has pertained, however, for several months which would tend to reduce the state of readiness for countering such a coup attempt. We have some information that counter-coup combat elements have been suborned. The fact that the coup principals remain as the responsible military authority enhances both their knowledge and ability to dispose the units both for and against.
2. Additional factors which should be noted are:
- A. To date the Generals have not indicated either a desire for or dependence on our support or actions for successful implementation of a coup. On the contrary, the Generals have repeatedly demanded the least possible American involvement.
 - B. Although we are well aware of the profundity of student and Buddhist dissidence and unrest and even ability to undertake certain limited action, we do not know of any plans to utilize these elements and of course cannot calculate the extent of spontaneous action they might undertake.
 - C. Action taken with respect to the Commercial Import Program and the severance of support and certain elements under Col Tung have created a coup atmosphere and some deterioration in the economic situation characterized by the fluctuation of the piastre value, the disappearance of gold on the market, and the rising prices of consumer commodities.
 - D. Please note Don does not want me to change date of my departure for Washington. We are reviewing whole situation Wednesday night to see whether change my departure is justified.
3. A point which must be completely understood is that we are not engineering the coup. The sum total of our relationship thus far is: that we will not thwart a coup; that we will monitor and report; and that Conein's long-standing friendship with Don may be a real help. Although there have been no requests to date by the Generals for material or financial support, we must anticipate that such requests may be forthcoming.
4. In summary, it would appear that a coup attempt by the Generals' group is imminent; that whether this coup fails or succeeds, the USG

must be prepared to accept the fact that we will be blamed, however unjustifiably; and finally, that no positive action by the USG can prevent a coup attempt short of informing Diem and Nhu with all the opprobrium that such an action would entail. Note too Don's statement we will only have four hours notice. This rules out my checking with you between time I learn of coup and time that it starts. It means U.S. will not be able significantly to influence course of events.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is CIA Station telegram [*document number not declassified*] from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Department of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 7:59 a.m.

227. Telegram From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) to the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins)¹

Washington, October 29, 1963.

JCS 4188-63. 1. In a discussion of the Vietnam situation at the JCS meeting with the Secretary of Defense on 28 October,² concern was expressed over what appears to us a continued lack of effective communication between you and Ambassador Lodge. For example, one receives the impression from CAS Saigon 1986⁴ and [*document number not declassified*]⁴ that there was a lack of common understanding of the Washington coup guidance. It appears that CAS Saigon 1896 and [*document number not declassified*]⁵ which quoted you on a sensitive subject were transmitted first and shown to you later. The issue reported in MAC 1993⁶ contains a disagreement on facts which might have been resolved in Saigon by direct discussion between principals prior to messages being sent to Washington. These examples tend to form a picture of a relationship which lacks the depth and continuity required by the complex circumstances in Saigon.

2. Related to the foregoing is the divergent reporting on the military situation arriving through the MACV and Ambassadorial channels. Saigon 768⁷ contains statements on the progress of the campaign at variance with those which we have received from you and with the impressions which Secretary McNamara and I received in Saigon. Are we correct in believing that the Ambassador is forwarding military reports and evaluations without consulting you?

3. In preparing to meet with Ambassador Lodge upon his return, it would be most helpful to receive your comments on the foregoing matters. If our impressions are correct, I would welcome any suggestions as to how we may help at this end to bring about a closer rapport between you and Ambassador Lodge.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Top Secret Cables, October 1963 (B). Top Secret; Eyes Only. The

telegram is a compilation of documents prepared for the White House; there is no time of transmission on the source text.

² No record of this meeting has been found.

⁴ Reference is to the first CIA telegram described in [Document 209](#).

⁴ Reference is to the first CIA telegram described in [Document 209](#).

⁵ Reference is to the second CIA telegram described in [Document 209](#).

⁶ Document 214.

⁷ Document 207.

228. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 29, 1963—6:30 p.m.

1. On 14 October, Bui Diem, Dai Viet oppositionist, told [*less than 1 line not declassified*] he optimistic at that time because military friends were continuing their plotting against regime. Said had feared apparent victory of Ngo family over United States might halt further coup planning but this not case because, even though many Vietnamese do not understand American policy, they also appreciate fact USG not satisfied current state affairs. Bui Diem noted continued reluctance Vietnamese talk freely Americans, since in past this has resulted in Diem regime knowing of such planning.
2. On 28 October, Bui Diem told [*less than 1 line not declassified*] that Generals who planning coup being very secretive for security reasons, such security lacking in past, and any break in security now disastrous for families all concerned. In context of [*less than 1 line not declassified*] warning about whom he should or should not speak to, Bui Diem said he understood Conein had a key role vis-a-vis the Americans and could Conein be trusted? Affirmative reply given. Bui Diem said it might be necessary for him contact Conein in future as alternate link between Conein and Generals if existing links disrupted.
3. Bui Diem said he had frequent contact with General Kim and that Kim most politically astute of Generals. He said Kim and Big Minh close on their thinking relative civilian role in or immediately after coup, that other Generals had been brought in on military side, namely Generals Don and Chieu, but that in military discussions the naming of specific civilians had been minimized in order not to compromise civilians. Bui Diem said civilian side not serious problem, that civilian leadership could be solved without much difficulty when time came. Noted his discussions with Kim and the several papers he had provided Kim were more concerned with structure and policies of a new govt than with personalities. [*less than 1 line not declassified*] remarked that structure, policies, and personalities of vital concern any group hoping for USG recognition, that any new govt would desire such recognition soonest, therefore these details should be made known in advance. Bui Diem also said he had emergency commo with Dr Phan Huy Quat, assigned this week to Can Tho area, and that Quat could be back in Saigon on short notice. He added that Quat

would in any case be in Saigon by end of week, and that he was acting as liaison between Generals and Quat.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is CIA Station telegram [*document number not declassified*] from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Department of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 8:11 a.m.

229. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 29, 1963—18:39 p.m.

1. Evening 25 October former Asst Minister of Defense, Tran Trung Dung, told CAS officer he had learned general officers planning coup within ten days. Coup to be led by Generals Don, "Big Minh", and that he understood General Le Van Kim involved at top level. Dung said apparently Generals planned the complete removal of the Ngo family.
2. Dung said that to his knowledge Generals had not yet approached civilian leaders. As he has previously, Dung expressed some concern about capabilities and intentions Generals. He considers majority of Generals no more than French trained sergeants in Generals' uniforms. Dung noted three exceptions this assessment: "Big Minh", Kim, and Pham Xuan Chieu. Dung said his concern re Generals was development of military junta and, although regime must be replaced, Generals lacked necessary political experience run govt.
3. Dung said he personally would prefer constitutional succession as interim solution. He noted Vice Pres Nguyen Ngoc Tho filled several requirements: Tho southerner, has gained a type of negative respect in posture vis-a-vis Diem and Nhu, was not ambitious for power, would delegate authority and responsibility, was not at odds with military, and most important, was flexible and would not fight change in constitution providing for Prime Minister. Dung said next best choice head an interim regime was Phan Huy Quat, who from center, could unify civilian leadership elements, was clean, capable executive and administrator, probably acceptable to military and would also delegate powers. Tho preferable as President, Quat as Prime Minister, with strong cabinet necessary to support either or both, further supported by energetic younger leaders at secondary echelon level.
4. Dung specifically singled out Tran Van Ly for Interior post, Phan Quang Dan, Tran Van Tuyen, and Pham Khao Suu, all for ministries: Dan or Suu for Social and Cultural Affairs, Dan or Suu for Civic Action, Tuyen for Information. Only three exiles worth consideration: Nguyen Goc Bich, due strong following and popularity Cochin China, Nguyen Huu Chau, who stood up to family and highly capable, and Nguyen Ton Hoan as good Minister for Youth. In category useless exiles Dung named Pham Huy Co and Hoang Co Thuy.

5. Dung himself said would not refuse serve in new govt, but clean sweep was necessary and fact he married to Diem niece may harm new grouping. Dung admitted resignation and aloof posture since, may nullify haul effects of his connections with Ngo family. [sic] Throughout evening Dung much more critical than before of Diem, Nhu, Madame Nhu, and entire Ngo entourage and govt hierarchy. Several times emphasized necessity clean sweep, Ngos beyond saving selves or country, and as in past will be sincerely agree reforms [sic], especially under pressure. Several times Dung toasted "second republic".
6. Despite disclaimers to contrary, it possible Dung involved current coup planning on civilian side. This based on following: Dung initial statement Don and "Big Minh" planning coup, seeming uncertainty re Kim, coupled with later statement when he included "Big Minh", Kim and Chieu in category capable Generals; his statement that to his knowledge civilians not approached, later mentioning some of more natural civilian leader candidates. On other hand, nothing Dung said proves he personally involved or has been approached, especially since what he said follows logical line of discussion and elicitation.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2041 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Department of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; and repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 9:25 a.m.

230. Paper Prepared for the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)¹

Washington, October 29, 1963.

TALKING POINTS

1. Status of coup planning.

- a. Don saw Ambassador Lodge briefly at airport Monday² morning Saigon time. Lodge confirmed bona fides of Conein. Don said coup group not yet ready. He said coup must be Vietnamese, and Lodge said we would not interfere or thwart.
- b. Don saw Conein Monday evening Saigon time.³ He said: Lodge would have plans before coup, but possibly only 4 hours in advance. He said nothing would happen for next 48 hours. Since he was told Lodge would leave Oct. 31 for US, there is reason to believe coup may be scheduled for Wednesday night or Thursday morning Saigon time (Wednesday morning or evening our time). Don's request to Conein to remain available at home starting Wednesday evening seems to confirm this estimate.

Command post for coup will be Joint General Staff hq. near airport in Saigon.

Don said he would be in touch with Conein again in 48 hours.

2. Estimate of coup.

- a. Position of military leaders—see attachment.
- b. Position of military units—see attachment. Picture is not very clear as there are many gaps in our information. Lodge explains this on security grounds. Coup group would appear to at least have preponderance of forces.
- c. Civilian role—see attachment.
- d. Lodge's estimate:⁴ Coup attempt by Generals is imminent; whether it fails or succeeds, U.S. will be held responsible; no positive action can prevent coup other than informing Diem and Nhu. There will be no time in any case to check with Washington re coup since Don indicates U.S. may be given only four hours' notice.

3. Possible actions for U.S. to consider:

a. Movement of U.S. military units⁵ in South China Seas and Okinawa into positions in which they were placed in August. Pro: to be in position to evacuate U.S. dependents in case of necessity. Con: will probably tip hand to GVN that something is up since GVN learned about our movements in August. Don asks that we avoid actions re American community that will tip off GVN. Our recommendation: ask for Lodge's view.

b.

Lodge will review his travel plans Wed. night Saigon time to see whether he can leave. Don has asked that he make no change in his plans because it might tip off GVN.⁶

Should we make military plane available to Lodge in order to make his travel plans more flexible? If so, it should go no further than the Philippines without further word from Washington.

c. On coup planning we suggest Washington leave the matter in Lodge's hands. Any action from here may gum up the matter.⁷

[Attachment 1]

[8](#)

Military Personalities

1. General Duong Van ("Big") Minh—leader of coup group and apparently its military planner. Most respected and popular of all military officers. Now holds nominal post of military advisor to the President.
2. General Le Van Kim—political planner for the coup. Most intelligent and has keenest political sense of all military officers. Very close to "Big" Minh and brother-in-law of General Don. Now holds nominal post with Interdepartmental Committee on Strategic Hamlets.
3. General Tran Van Don—contact man for coup group with Americans, other Generals and division commanders. Serves as Acting Chief of the Joint General Staff, the top military position.
4. General Pham Xuan Chieu—earlier said by Don to be one of four Generals on coup committee. Known to be rather close to other Generals named above. Now serves as an inspector of strategic hamlets.

5. General Tran Thien Khiem—earlier reported by Minh as member of coup planning group, but now apparently not active with group as Don reports he is under suspicion by the President. Serves as Chief of Staff of the Joint General Staff (i.e., No. 2 to Don).
6. General Do Cao Tri—evidently made aware of coup plan by Don, but as CG I Corps in Central Viet-Nam, too far away to play an immediate role.
7. General Nguyen Khanh—CG II Corps in Central Viet-Nam. Same comments as for Tri.
- 8.

General Ton That Dinh—CG III Corps with headquarters in Saigon. Neutralized by coup sympathizers around him.

[Numbered paragraph 9 (2 lines) not declassified]

[Attachment 2]

[2](#)

Military Units

Don does not know exactly the position of military units regarding the coup, but has furnished some information (all we have).

Of key units following is status based on Don's sketchy information:

1. Presidential Guard—2500 with 15 tanks and 12 armored personnel carriers. "Some units" and at least 4 tanks with coup group.
2. Armor Branch—4300 with 21 tanks, 41 armored personnel carriers and 14 armored cars. No information from Don, but loyalty to Diem earlier considered highly questionable.
3. Airborne Brigade—2550 in Saigon area. One-half of brigade with coup group.
4. Marine Brigade—1500 in Saigon area. Two battalions with coup group.
5. Special Forces—1840. Presumably with Diem as not involved with coup group.
6. Air Force—2812 in Saigon area. All with coup group.
7. Navy—2200 in Saigon area. Presumably with Diem as not involved with coup group.
8. 5th Division—hq. at Bien Hoa about 20 miles from Saigon. All with coup.

9. 7th Division—hq. at My Tho south of Saigon. Position on coup unknown.
10. 9th Division—newly moved to Delta from Central Viet-Nam. With coup after it starts.
11. 21st Division—hq. deep in Delta. All with coup.
12. 23rd Division—hq. at Benmethnot in Central Plateau, about 200 miles from Saigon. Half with coup.
13. 22nd, 25th, 2nd and 1st Divisions—all far removed from Saigon in Central Viet-Nam. No information on their position.
14. 135th Territorial Regiment—hq. in Saigon. Not involved in coup plan—presumably not contacted.

[Attachment 3]

Memorandum From the Director of the Vietnam Working Group (Kattenburg) to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rice)¹⁰

Washington, October 29, 1963.

SUBJECT

Civilian Leadership of Coup Group

1.

The four names of civilians associated with the Generals' coup group which we received this morning, e.g.:

Dang Van Sung
Pham Huy Quat¹¹
Tran Trung Dung
Bui Diem

are all connected with the *Dai Viet* party, a long-standing non-Communist nationalist opposition group, anti-French before independence and anti-Diem since. The group is generally pro-U.S.

2. Recognized older leaders of the Dai Viet are Sung (48 years old) and his cousin-by-marriage Quat (long highly regarded by our official representatives in Saigon). They have both managed to remain relatively inconspicuous in their opposition, and thus to avoid arrest in recent years. President Diem is known to have considerable respect for Quat, but the latter has consistently refused to join and serve the GVN.

3. Bui Diem is a much younger Dai Viet leader, who has for several years been one of the few oppositionists in regular contact [*less than 1 line not declassified*]. He is assessed as very dynamic.
4. Tran Trung Dung, who is related by marriage to the Ngo family and who served Diem capably as Defense Secretary from 1955 to Nov. 1960, is a definite asset to the group. Recent telegram on his views is attached.¹²
5. The absence of any reference to Vice President Nguyen Ngoc Tho in these recent messages does not, in my opinion, indicate he is not involved. He is Big Minh's closest political contact and will most likely emerge as Constitutional successor. In his case, however, extreme security precautions are obviously required.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam, 10/1/ 63-10/10/63 and undated. Top Secret. No drafting information is given on the source text. The paper was apparently prepared in anticipation of the meeting on the coup at 4 p m.; see [Document 234](#). There are notes on the source text apparently in Hilsman's handwriting indicating that Harriman, U. Alexis Johnson, Ball, Sullivan, and Hilsman met at 2:20 and 3:20, perhaps to refine these talking points.

² October 28. See [Document 224](#).

³ See [Document 225](#).

⁴ Document 226.

⁵ A handwritten note at this point reads: "Ltd. stand by alert Sat? by White House. Forrestal did something, S/S Read says."

⁶ A handwritten note at this point reads: "Secy thinks 1) as seen from here Lodge should not follow schedule (plans as scheduled) 2) Ensure Harkins filled in." A note in the margin reads: "Decide p.m."

⁷ Handwritten notes at the bottom of the page read: "Secy 3rd Intel assessmt-prospects, Intel people new assessmt," and "What do we do if both sides ask support-e.g. helicopters?"

⁸ Top Secret. Prepared by Mendenhall.

⁹ Top Secret. Prepared by Mendenhall.

¹⁰ Top Secret.

¹¹ A handwritten note next to Quat's name reads: "Probable Prime Min."

¹² Not found.

231. Briefing Paper¹

Washington, October 29, 1963.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION AT OCTOBER 29 MEETING²

1. Should Lodge proceed with his travel plans to the U.S.?

Recommendation: Yes, unless the coup occurs before his scheduled departure. Otherwise, the GVN may be tipped off something is in the wind.

2. What other American officials in Saigon should be made privy to coup information to enable them to act in Lodge's absence?

Recommendations:

- (a) Mr. Trueheart, the DCM, who will become Charge and thus be the senior U.S. representatives in Viet-Nam.
- (b) General Harkins, who will play an important role in the protection of Americans in Viet-Nam.
- (c) Acting Chief of CAS Station [*less than 1 line not declassified*] is already privy to coup information.

3. Should the U.S. try to prevent the Generals' coup?

Recommendation: Since the U.S. may not receive coup plans until 4 hours before the event, there may not be sufficient time for a U.S. decision to be made.

In any case, we do not believe the U.S. should at this late stage attempt to thwart a coup for the following reasons:

- (a) Lodge has told the coup group repeatedly, either directly or through Conein, that we would not thwart a coup.
- (b) This is the best chance for a successful coup we are likely to have.
- (c) Any attempt to thwart now would leave a great legacy of bitterness and distrust on the part of the Generals toward the U.S.
- (d) While there is, of course, considerable risk in connection with a coup and no absolute guarantee of success, any other course of action or inaction involves risks equally as great or greater.

4. Should U.S. military units in South China Seas and Okinawa be moved into the same positions of readiness they had in August?

Recommendation: That we seek Lodge's view. It may be necessary to use U.S. forces from outside Viet-Nam to protect Americans during evacuation. On the other hand, movement of U.S. forces may tip off the GVN since the GVN learned about our movements in August. Movement of these forces would also show prior U.S. knowledge of coup planning.

5. What other actions could be taken for the safety of American personnel in Vietnam?

Recommendation: No other action appears necessary or feasible. Review of the evacuation plan indicates that the plan is ready to function, but its operation may be hampered by any unfriendly government.

6. What action should we take if requested by either side for support after a coup starts?

Recommendation: Since we have told the coup group we will not thwart a coup, we should refuse any GVN request for our support.

We are doubtful that the coup group will ask for support since Don says the coup group wishes to avoid American involvement and the coup should be thoroughly Vietnamese. If the coup group does make a request for support, we should be prepared to offer it if the field so recommends at the time.

7. What is the balance of forces vis-a-vis a coup?

Answer: The picture is not very clear as there are many gaps in our information. Lodge explains these gaps on security grounds.

However, on the basis of units reported to form the coup, the coup group appears to have at least a preponderance of the forces. Since it does not necessarily follow that all other units are anti-coup, the coup group may have a great preponderance of the forces.

8. What public posture do we adopt immediately after it becomes known that coup is in progress?

Recommendation: We state, both here and in the field, that we are closely following reports and watching developments. If asked about

foreknowledge, we reply we had none. If asked whether we continue to recognize the Diem Government, we should reply that no action has been taken on this matter. If asked whether we are continuing aid to the Diem Government, we should reply we continue to support the Vietnamese people in their efforts to defeat the Communist enemy and to build a better future. In this, we wish them all success.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam, 10/1/63-10/31/63 and undated. Top Secret. No drafting information is given on the source text, but initials on an earlier draft indicate it was prepared for Rusk, Harriman, U. Alexis Johnson, and Mendenhall. (*Ibid.*)

² See [Document 234](#).

232. Briefing Paper Prepared in the White House¹

Washington, October 29, 1963.

CHECK LIST FOR 4 PM MEETING²

(Not intended to be exhaustive)

1. Intelligence

- A. Estimate of prospective balance of forces;
- B. Estimate of quality and quantity of military leadership committed;
- C. Summary of intelligence questions on which it would be profitable to ask further field assessment, e.g.,
 - 1. Can we insist on independent process of confirmation or crosscheck?
 - 2. Should we ask for a separate evaluation on these questions by Harkins?

2. Lodge's Movements

- A. If we keep him in place, what are consequences for
 - 1. Plausible denial;
 - 2. Possible indefinite delay in return while nothing happens;
 - 3. Possible bad signal to Nhu or to coup group.
- B. If he returns on schedule, who is in charge in Saigon, and under what instructions. (There should be a draft instruction to Trueheart and Harkins on this point for the 4 o'clock meeting.)

3. Contingency Planning

- A. CINCPAC—Presumably Defense will draft instructions for Felt which will preserve cover but move substantial forces to within easy range of Saigon.
- B. Response to coup. Presumably Harkins should be asked for detailed plans on use and withholding of U.S. forces so as not to choose up sides.
- C. There should be a political scenario of U.S. posture:
 - 1. while in a possibly prolonged struggle;
 - 2. if coup succeeds;
 - 3. if coup fails.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. On a draft of this paper, McGeorge Bundy wrote the following note: "Should we cool off the whole enterprise[?]" (*Ibid.*, Vietnam, Memos and Miscellaneous)

² See [Document 234](#).

233. Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President¹

Washington, October 29, 1963.

SUBJECT

Item for your 4 o'clock meeting this afternoon²

I think it would be a wise precaution at the end of this meeting to ask that one copy of all important separate instructions and reports made on any channel—State, CIA, DOD, USIA, and JCS—be sent over here during this next period for your personal information.

My object here is to provide a check on the tone of voice of policy-level messages in these tense periods. There is just no doubt at all that a good deal of our trouble in the last three months has come from differences of emphasis, at least, in what we have said to the field. It is pointlessly cumbersome to inhibit the dispatch of business by requiring interdepartmental clearance on everything, but the existence of a single information copy of everything important for you over here will allow Mike and me to call to your attention any serious divergences.

In requesting such a single information copy, you would be safe in saying that in no case would any such copy be given any additional circulation without direct notice from you to the agency concerned.

I do not underestimate the sensitivity of this order. JCS, DOD, and CIA particularly feel that they have a right to communication downward that is not monitored from above. But your interest is not served by the uncritical acceptance of that right.

McG.B.³

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, McGeorge Bundy Files, Memos for the President.

² See [Document 234](#).

³ Printed from a copy that bears these typed initials.

234. Memorandum of Conference With President Kennedy¹

Washington, October 29, 1963—4:20 p.m.

SUBJECT

Vietnam

OTHERS PRESENT

Vice President, Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, Attorney General, Director McCone, General Taylor, General Krulak, Under Secretary Harriman, Mr. Alexis Johnson, Mr. William Bundy, Mr. Helms, Mr. Mendenhall (State), Mr. Colby (CIA), Mr. Bundy, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Bromley Smith

Mr. Colby of CIA gave the current status of coup forces. He estimated that the pro-Diem and anti-Diem forces were about even, approximately 9800 on each side, with 18,000 listed as neutral. The briefing was illustrated with a CIA order of battle map.²

The President asked what Diem had learned from the attempted coup in 1960. Mr. Colby replied that Diem now had much better communications with military forces deployed outside Saigon. He could thus call into Saigon rapidly loyal forces to oppose rebel forces in the city. The 1960 coup was frustrated when forces outside Saigon remained loyal, moved into Saigon, and defeated the forces which had surrounded the palace.

Mr. McGeorge Bundy suggested that the assessment just given the group be sent to Saigon to see if our officials there agreed with it. He asked whether Ambassador Lodge should return to Washington now and mentioned that some of those present felt he should stay in Saigon.

Secretary Rusk said we must assume that Diem and Nhu have heard rumors about a coup. The question for us is whether we think there is enough prospect of a successful coup to make the decision to keep silent. Should we let the coup Generals know that a protracted civil war must not be the result of their efforts to overthrow Diem? Should we tell them we would support them only if the coup is short and bloodless? If fighting between the two sides takes place, each will ask for our help. If we support Diem, then we will disrupt the war effort because we will be acting against those Generals who are now fighting the war against the Viet Cong. If we support the rebel Generals, then we will have to guarantee that they are successful in overthrowing the Diem government.

Ambassador Lodge was asked by General Don to stick to his departure plan so Lodge should go ahead as he had planned. We now have little information. We need 48, not 4, hours advance notice of any coup. We should put our faith in no one, including General Don. We should caution the Generals that they must have the situation in hand before they launch a coup. We should tell them we have no interest whatsoever in a long civil war in South Vietnam.

The President agreed that Ambassador Lodge should leave Saigon for Washington as he had planned. He thought the rebel Generals should talk to General Harkins. He said the odds were against a coup. He suggested that General Harkins be put in charge of our mission in Saigon when Ambassador Lodge leaves. If Ambassador Lodge delays his departure, Diem will know we are aware of coup plans. It would be good to have Ambassador Lodge out of the country when a coup takes place.

Regarding the estimate that the pro- and anti-Diem forces are evenly balanced, the President commented that it always looks this way until the coup actually begins. Then support for the coup is forthcoming, as was apparent, for example, in Korea.

General Taylor cautioned against looking at the Vietnam situation as if it were a football game. He said a few key people are crucial to the success of a coup and are more important than total numbers.

The President asked that we try to find out who these key people are.

Secretary McNamara asked who of our officials in Saigon are in charge of the coup planning. He suggested that the Deputy Chief of Mission, Trueheart, the Acting Chief of CIA, *[less than 1 line not declassified]*, and General Harkins form a group which would (a) jointly decide on what our agent Conein would say and do and (b) hear all of Conein's reports. If any of the three disagree, a report would be sent back to Washington at once. General Harkins may not know what the Embassy and CIA are now doing. Trueheart should head the Vietnamese country team until the coup was initiated. At that time, General Harkins would take over with Trueheart becoming his political adviser.

Director McCone did not agree that a troika should be set up in Saigon. He said it would be better for the CIA officer to take direction rather than participate in a decision-making group.

The Attorney General, acknowledging that he had not seen all of the reports, said that in his opinion the present situation makes no sense to him on the face of it. The situation in Vietnam is not comparable to that in Iraq or in a South American country where a coup could be brought off promptly. The situation now is no different than that of four months ago when the Generals were not able to organize a coup. To support a coup would be putting the future of Vietnam and in fact all of Southeast Asia in the hands of one man not now known to us. Diem will not run from a fight or quit under pressure. A failure of a coup risks so much. The reports we have are very thin and the information about the assets which the rebel Generals have at their command is limited. We have a right to know what the rebel Generals are planning. We can't go half way. If the coup fails, Diem will throw us out. If we send out the draft cable³ as it stands, it will appear that we are in favor of a coup and only want more information. "My view is the minority view."

Secretary Rusk replied that if we say we are not for a coup, then the coup-minded military leaders will turn against us and the war effort will drop off rapidly.⁴

General Taylor said he agreed with the Attorney General. When pressed by the President, General Taylor said that even a successful coup would slow down the war effort because the new central government would be inexperienced. In addition, all of the province chiefs appointed by Diem would probably be replaced by a new government.

Director McCone said he agreed with General Taylor. The failure of a coup would be a disaster and a successful coup would have a harmful effect on the war effort.

The President asked General Taylor why all the province chiefs would be replaced. He replied that as Diem appointees they would be loyal to Diem, and therefore, not trusted by the rebel Generals who had overthrown Diem.

Secretary Rusk said the important question was whether the rebel Generals could achieve quick success. He felt that in the long run, if the Diem government continued, the war effort would go down hill.

Mr. Harriman said it was clear that in Vietnam there was less and less enthusiasm for Diem. We cannot predict that the rebel Generals can overthrow the Diem government, but Diem cannot carry the country to

victory over the Viet Cong. With the passage of time, our objectives in Vietnam will become more and more difficult to achieve with Diem in control.

The President said it appears that the pro- and anti-Diem military forces are about equal. If this is so, any attempt to engineer a coup is silly. If Lodge agrees with this point of view, then we should instruct him to discourage a coup.

Mr. McGeorge Bundy said the most unfortunate development would be a three-day civil war in Saigon. The time remaining for us to instruct Lodge is very short. If a military plane were sent to pick up Lodge, the Ambassador could stay longer in Vietnam during the uncertain days immediately ahead.

Secretary McNamara thought that we ought to leave it up to Ambassador Lodge when he would leave Saigon for Washington. In commenting on the draft cable, he said he thought Lodge would read it as a change of signals. Lodge now believes that he is not to thwart a coup. The draft instructs him to call in General Harkins, which would be difficult to do in view of the fact that Lodge is not now keeping General Harkins informed of developments. The Ambassador should be given an option to delay his return if he wishes.

The President asked what were Lodge's existing instructions. In reply, Secretary Rusk read a paragraph from the October 5 telegram.⁵

The President agreed to ask Lodge what he thought he ought to do about resuming to Washington. Mr. McGeorge Bundy said the working group would rewrite the draft cable.

Bromley Smith⁶

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. The meeting was held in the White House. Another record of this conference, drafted by Mendenhall, is *ibid.*, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam, White House Meetings, State Memcons. In *To Move a Nation*, Hilsman gives a detailed description of this meeting, pp. 518-519.

² Not found. Mendenhall's record of this conference contains a more complete treatment of Colby's briefing as follows:

"Mr. Colby opened with an intelligence assessment of the lineup of forces pro-Diem and pro-coup. He indicated this assessment was not based on the information from General Don just received by cable, but rather on an overall CAS assessment of available information. He said that the pro and anti GVN forces in Saigon number about the same on each side: 9,800. There are also about 18,000 forces in the Saigon area which can be classified as neutral. Of the key elements, he listed the Presidential guard, the special forces, and the armor unit in the Saigon area as pro-GVN, except for one element of the Presidential guard He listed airborne, air force and some parts of the Marine forces as anti-palace. In response to the President's question, he stated that the only change since August is that two Marine units have moved over to the palace side.

"Mr. Colby said that there are two main categories of coup groups: (1) Can Lao dissidents; and (2) the Generals. There is some contact between these two main categories, but not very much."

The reference to the "information from General Don just received by cable" is to [Document 225](#).

³ For the telegram as sent, see [Document 236](#). No draft has been found.

⁴ In Mendenhall's record, Rusk is paraphrased as follows: "if a major part of the Vietnamese military leadership feels that the war against the Viet Cong could not be won with the Diem Government then it is a major risk for the U.S. in continuing with this government." According to Mendenhall's record, "The Attorney General remarked that he was aware of no support for the view of certain Vietnamese military leaders that the war could not be won with the Diem Government. General Taylor expressed agreement with the Attorney Generals' point of view."

⁵ Apparent reference to [Document 182](#).

⁶ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

235. Memorandum of a Conference With President Kennedy¹

Washington, October 29, 1963, 18 p.m.

SUBJECT
Vietnam

OTHERS PRESENT
Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, General Krulak, Under Secretary Harriman, Assistant Secretary Hilsman, Mr. Alexis Johnson, Mr. William Bundy, Mr. Mendenhall (State), Mr. McGeorge Bundy, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Bromley Smith

A revised cable to Ambassador Lodge was circulated to the group (copy attached).²

The President commented that he was not so concerned now about the kind of a government which would exist after the coup as he was about the correlation of pro- and anti-Diem forces.

Secretary McNamara agreed and asked that the draft cable stress our objection to a situation in which there would be major fighting between the Diem forces and the rebel Generals.

The President said the burden of proof should be on the coup promoters to show that they can overthrow the Diem government and not create a situation in which there would be a draw. We can discourage a coup in ways other than telling Diem of the rebel Generals' plans. What we say to the coup Generals can be crucial short of revealing their plans to Diem. The paragraph referring to post-Diem government matters should be dropped. Lodge should be told that from here we can see that a disaster could take place and that if the rebels can't win, it would not be sensible for them to go ahead. Lodge feels that the coup is comparable to a stone rolling down hill which can't be stopped. If this is so, then no one can say that we are to blame for the coup, no matter what we do.

In reviewing a request for a country team assessment of the coup situation, the President asked that we make clear to Lodge the doubts we have concerning the military strength of the rebel Generals and ask him to ask the rebel Generals how they plan to deal with a situation in which their military strength is apparently inferior to that of the Diem regime.

The President reiterated his suggestion that Lodge should tell the Generals that they must prove they can pull off a successful coup or, in our opinion, it would be a mistake to proceed. If we miscalculated, we could lose our entire position in Southeast Asia overnight.

The President said that he agreed that Lodge should return to Washington by military plane, the time of his departure to be left up to him.

Bromley Smith³

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings on Vietnam. Top Secret. Drafted by Smith. The meeting was held in the White House.

² Not found; the cable as sent is [Document 236](#).

³ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

236. Telegram From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)¹

Washington, October 29, 1963—7:22 p.m.

Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge from McGeorge Bundy.

1. Your 2023, [*document number not declassified*], 2041 and [*document number not declassified*]² examined with care at highest levels here. You should promptly discuss this reply and associated messages with Harkins whose responsibilities toward any coup are very heavy especially after you leave (see paragraph 7 below). They give much clearer picture group's alleged plans and also indicate chances of action with or without our approval now so significant that we should urgently consider our attitude and contingency plans. We note particularly Don's curiosity your departure and his insistence Conein be available from Wednesday³ night on, which suggests date might be as early as Thursday.
2. Believe our attitude to coup group can still have decisive effect on its decisions. We believe that what we say to coup group can produce delay of coup and that betrayal of coup plans to Diem is not our only way of stopping coup. We therefore need urgently your combined assessment with Harkins and CAS (including their separate comments if they desire). We concerned that our line-up of forces in Saigon (being cabled in next message)⁴ indicates approximately equal balance of forces, with substantial possibility serious and prolonged fighting or even defeat. Either of these could be serious or even disastrous for U.S. interests, so that we must have assurance balance of forces clearly favorable.
3. With your assessment in hand, we might feel that we should convey message to Don, whether or not he gives 4 or 48 hours notice that would (a) continue explicit hands-off policy, (b) positively encourage coup, or (c) discourage.
4. In any case, believe Conein should find earliest opportunity express to Don that we do not find presently revealed plans give clear prospect of quick results. This conversation should call attention important Saigon units still apparently loyal to Diem and raise serious issue as to what means coup group has to deal with them.

5. From operational standpoint, we also deeply concerned Don only spokesman for group and possibility cannot be discounted he may not be in good faith. We badly need some corroborative evidence whether Minh and others directly and completely involved. In view Don's claim he doesn't handle "military planning" could not Conein tell Don that we need better military picture and that Big Minh could communicate this most naturally and easily to Stilwell? We recognize desirability involving MACV to minimum, but believe Stilwell far more desirable this purpose than using Conein both ways.
6. Complexity above actions raises question whether you should adhere to present Thursday schedule. Concur you and other US elements should take no action that could indicate US awareness coup possibility. However, DOD is sending berth-equipped military aircraft that will arrive Saigon Thursday and could take you out thereafter as late as Saturday afternoon in time to meet your presently proposed arrival Washington Sunday. You could explain this being done as convenience and that your Washington arrival is same. A further advantage such aircraft is that it would permit your prompt return from any point en route if necessary. To reduce time in transit, you should use this plane, but we recognize delaying your departure may involve greater risk that you personally would appear involved if any action took place. However, advantages your having extra two days in Saigon may outweigh this and we leave timing of flight to your judgment.
7. Whether you leave Thursday or later, believe it essential that prior your departure there be fullest consultation Harkins and CAS and that there be clear arrangements for handling (a) normal activity, (b) continued coup contacts, (c) action in event a coup starts. We assume you will wish Trueheart as charge to be head of country team in normal situation, but highest authority desires it clearly understood that after your departure Harkins should participate in supervision of all coup contacts and that in event coup begins, he become head of country team and direct representative of President, with Trueheart in effect acting as POLAD. On coup contacts we will maintain continuous guidance and will expect equally continuous reporting with prompt account of any important divergencies in assessments of Harkins and *[less than 1 line not declassified]*.
8. If coup should start, question of protecting U.S. nationals at once arises. We can move Marine btl into Saigon by air from Okinawa within 24 hours if Tan Son Nhut available. We are sending instructions to CINCPAC to arrange orderly movement of seaborne Marine btl to waters adjacent to South Vietnam in position to close Saigon within approximately 24 hours.

9. We are now examining post-coup contingencies here and request your immediate recommendations on position to be adopted after coup begins, especially with respect to requests for assistance of different sorts from one side or the other. Also request you forward contingency recommendations for action if coup (a) succeeds, (b) fails, (c) is indecisive.
10. We reiterate burden of proof must be on coup group to show a substantial possibility of quick success; otherwise, we should discourage them from proceeding since a miscalculation could result in jeopardizing U.S. position in Southeast Asia.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret. The source text is CIA telegram [*document number not declassified*] sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; and repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt. Also printed in *Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition*, vol. 11, pp. 782-783.

² Documents 225, [226](#), [229](#) and [228](#), respectively.

³ October 30.

⁴ Document 237.

237. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency to the Station in Saigon¹

Washington, October 29, 1963—9:21 p.m.

1.

Available info here indicates that Generals do not have clear preponderance of force in Saigon area, posing possibility of extended fighting, which we wish to avoid, or even defeat. We do not refer to overall numerical relationship, but weighted estimate with recognition of critical factors of key units, surprise, resolution, disposition, strength, etc. Would appreciate your review of our holdings re following units, and their component elements, viewed here as of decisive importance and your estimate of role they would play in coup initiated by these Generals. Presidential Guard. Two tens totaling 2500 men, fifteen tanks twelve armored personnel carriers near Palace, presumed loyal although Don claims one company and both Thao and Tuyen have claimed that disaffection exists.

The Airborne Brigade. Six tens totaling 4800 men. Two tens Bien Hoa area. Remaining four tens in Cap Mil District, especially at Tan Son Nhut. Don claims half with coup, Tuyen claimed first, fifth, sixth and eighth tens disaffected. Many officers discontented but contradictory reports re Col. Vien loyalty.

Marine Brigade. Four tens totaling 4500 men. First and third tens Saig. Second and fourth in IV Corps. Reports indicate two or three tens reported disaffected but no firm identification. No hard reading on Commander Col. Khang or unit commanders in terms willingness actively join coup. Armor first squadron principally Saigon and north. Varied collection tanks, armored cars and personnel carriers. Commander in past reported as loyal to Diem but some more recent indications of disaffection by him and by several unit commanders under him. Our reading, however, is that unit would be loyal to Palace in coup situation. Second squadron My Tho. Some early indications of pro coup possibilities but more recent reports leave orientation in doubt.

Special Forces. 1200 men of which bulk in Saigon area, all presumed loyal to Palace.

Police. Uniformed 4500. No hard info but not considered decisive. Combat police 800. No hard info but presumed loyal to regime.

Fifth Division. Bien Hoa and north. 9200 men. We hold bulk as unknown despite reports certain smaller components have tendencies toward Generals and Don's claim of whole division.

Seventh Division. My Tho. 9200 men. We carried Commander Colonel Dam as possible joining coup but no hard info this unit.

Air Force. Possibly susceptible to coup effort but believed by nature not capable of deciding issue in coup situation.

Other units exist in Saigon area such as Quang Trung training center, military police, civil guard, territorial regiment, administrative and technical personnel etc., but these not believed likely to be decisive in coup situation.

2. Summarizing, comparative forces lineup would appear give Palace quite firm base in Presidential Guard, Special Forces, with possible help of some Marines, some Airborne and some Armor. Coup side is estimated to include some Airborne, some Marines, some Armor and Air Force and units outside of Saigon which could not play immediate role.
3. In answering above, request that availability of transportation, fuel, ammo and any known GVN control mechanisms over units be considered in connection with each unit's loyalty and ability to influence a coup in Saigon.
4. Request that MACV and MAAG be consulted in formulating answers to above, and that Amb be shown this message.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret. The source text is CIA telegram [*document number not declassified*] sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; and to Honolulu eyes only for Felt. Received at the Department of State at 11:34 p.m.

238. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)
to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 30, 1963—11:55 a.m.

1. On 28 October 1963 Tran Quoc Buu stated to a CAS officer that the CVTC and the Vietnamese people as a whole would willingly support a military government brought about by force of arms. They would support an even tougher government than the present regime, as long as it proved itself honest and capable of pursuing a sound policy. The various opposition groups would accept such a government also, particularly since such groups lacked organization and numbers. The CVTC would not ask for representation in the government but would carry weight nonetheless, since it was the only independent organization, with the possible exception of the Buddhist groups, which had a large and disciplined membership.
2. Buu added that the key to any change of government at this time is the military. Probably nothing will happen until the military acts; then all elements of the population will immediately rally to the cause, and the present regime would fall in short order.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2060 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy and to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy. Repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 12:15 a.m.

239. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 30, 1963, 9 a.m.

816. Herewith are some ideas for study in the Department and for possible discussion when I am in Washington on the conditions under which the U.S. might resume payment of commercial imports to Vietnam.

1. We should decide that we will not again give the GVN a blank check and that for the future all aid will be given, for example, on a quarterly basis so that at all times we have some control.
2. We should also make it clear that we will not pay back the amount which was lost by the suspension.
3. If we decide to resume payments on the strength of an offer by them to do certain things, I would hope that these things would really go to the fundamentals. For example, I attach no value whatever to reshuffling the cabinet. This is one example of a purely superficial measure.
4. Some of the steps which would have some meaning would be as follows:²
 - a. Putting Mr. Nhu into the Cabinet or into some position with definite limitations where he could be more easily watched and controlled.
 - b. Liberating the prisoners, both Buddhists and students.
 - c. Reopening all the schools.
 - d. Eliminating discriminatory features of Decree Law No. 10.
 - e. Loosening press censorship so as to provide a safety valve for unorthodox opinions.
 - f. Stop arresting people who oppose the government so that there can be some loyal opposition. In general, to be less timid.
 - g. Allow the legislature to function better by having Cabinet Ministers subject to questioning by the legislature.
 - h. Allowing labor to operate in the provinces.
 - i. Let the UN Mission see whomever and whatever it wants.
5. I can think of no way whereby the execution of such a plan could be guaranteed or how we can protect ourselves against foot dragging and evasions.
6. We may also face a situation in which they refuse to do anything and yet we consider that we might resume payments. In that case I might

call on Diem, tell him we were going to resume payments on certain items for limited periods and read to him a statement which I would then leave with him and which might say something as follows:

“Mr. President, the United States is about to resume payment for certain types of commercial imports for a limited period of time.

“You should know that we suspended these payments in part because of the police state methods used in Vietnam against Buddhist leaders, students and even against Americans. Public opinion was also concerned that the public statements of Madame Nhu and others apparently expressed the point of view of the Government of Vietnam. These things had weakened the support of American public opinion for American help to Vietnam. Under our system of government, even our President cannot go against the full force of public opinion.

“We now conclude that while much has been done to shake American confidence, there is still faith that the Government of Vietnam, working with the people and the army, and abandoning any exaggerated concern for its own tenure of office, will concentrate wholeheartedly on winning the war against the Viet Cong.

“But candor compels us to say that we must not again be put into the position of condoning brutality and totalitarian practices which go squarely against our traditions and customs.”

7. Hope Department will study which of the measures in paragraphs a to i are more or less self-enforcing, that is which the public can watch and see that they are done.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, FT 1 S VIET. Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution. Received at 2:39 a.m. and passed to the White House at 4:50 a.m.

² In telegram 820 from Saigon, October 30, Lodge added the additional suggested step:

"The most important aim for the government of Vietnam is an effective program for land ownership by the masses of everyday peasants of Vietnam. No other single measure could do more to make the peasant feel that he has a stake in the country and that he will therefore give information and food to the government of Vietnam. This might be that extra political and psychological something which would put the whole war effort over the top." (*Ibid.*, POL 27 S VIET)

240. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Saigon, October 30, 1963, 4 p.m.

MAC 2028. Your JCS 4188-63² arrived as I was in the process of drafting one for you along the same lines. I share your concern. I have not as yet seen Saigon 768.³ I sent to the Embassy for a copy at 0830 this morning-as of now 1100-the Embassy has not released it. Also CINCPAC 0-300040Z⁴ info JCS came as a surprise to me as I am unaware of any change in local situation which indicates necessity for actions directed. Perhaps I'll find the answer in Saigon 768. Or perhaps actions directed in CINCPAC 300040Z are precautionary in light of Gen Don's statement reported in [*document number not declassified*]⁵ that a coup would take place in any case not later than 2 November. It might be noted Don also is supposed to have said [*document number not declassified*]⁶ that though the coup committee would not release the details, the Ambassador would receive the complete plan for study two days prior to the scheduled times for the coup.

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

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

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

Both CAS Saigon 1896⁷ and [*document number not declassified*]⁸ were sent first and delivered to me after dispatch. My 1991⁹ was discussed

with the Ambassador prior to dispatch. My 1993¹⁰ was not, basically because I had not seen CAS Saigon [*document number not declassified*]⁸ before dispatch and I just wanted to get the record straight from my side and where my name was involved.

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

Fritz would always clear messages concerning the military with me or my staff prior to dispatch. So would [*less than 1 line not declassified*] if MACV was concerned. This is not true today. Cite CAS 1896 and [*document number not declassified*]¹¹ for examples. Also you will recall I was not the recipient of several messages you held when you were here.

CINCPAC brought this matter up again when I saw him in Bangkok, this past week end. He is going to make a check when he returns to see if he holds messages I have not received. Have just received Saigon 768.¹² I will have to report you are correct in believing that the Ambassador is forwarding military reports and evaluations without consulting me. For his weekly report to the President, at his request, I furnish him a short military statement. For preparation of 768 I made no mention of the Delta. I will answer 768 separately today.

There is a basic difference apparently between the Ambassador's thinking and mine on the interpretation of the guidance contained in CAP 63560 dated 6 October¹³ and the additional thoughts, I repeat, thoughts expressed in CAS Washington 74228 dated 9 October.¹⁴ I interpret CAP 63560 as our basic guidance and that CAS 74228 being additional thoughts did not change the basic guidance in that no initiative should now be taken to give any active covert encouragement to a coup. The Ambassador feels that 74228 does change 63560 and that a change of government is desired and feels as stated in CAS Saigon [*document number not declassified*]¹⁵ that the only way to bring about such a change is by a coup.

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

at any proposed list before we make any decisions. In my contacts here I have seen no one with the strength of character of Diem, at least in fighting communists. Certainly there are no Generals qualified to take over in my opinion. I am not a Diem man per se. I certainly see the faults in his character. I am here to back 14 million SVN people in their fight against communism and it just happens that Diem is their leader at this time. Most of the Generals I have talked to agree they can go along with Diem, all say it's the Nhu family they are opposed to.

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

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

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

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

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

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State and Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to Bangkok for Felt. Attached to the source text was a signed note from Krulak to McGeorge Bundy stating that Taylor asked that this message,

which had been shown only to McNamara at Defense, should be conveyed to Bundy. Also printed in *Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition*, Vol. 11, pp. 784-785.

² Document 227.

³ Document 207.

⁴ Not found.

⁵ Reference is to the second CIA telegram cited in [Document 209](#).

⁶ Not found.

⁷ See [footnote 5](#), [Document 207](#).

⁸ Reference is to the same telegram cited in [footnote 5](#) above.

⁹ Document 213.

¹⁰ Document 214.

⁸ Reference is to the same telegram cited in [footnote 5](#) above.

¹¹ Reference is to the same telegram cited in [footnotes 5](#) and [8](#) above.

¹² Document 207.

¹³ Document 182.

¹⁴ Document 192.

¹⁵ Document 216.

241. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 30, 1963—4:45 p.m.

822. Joint Embassy/USOM message. Reference: Deptel 601.²

- I. Reftel covers two different classic issues:
 - a. Methods for removing Can Lao influence and opportunities profit from US aid program, and
 - b. Procedural changes in economic aid programs not necessarily related a above.
- II. Detailed information on first class issues best dealt with by CAS and they will provide separate report. Undoubtedly Can Lao profits from wide range economic concessions not necessarily related aid programs. Special treatment accorded taxes, monopolies, licenses, government loans, contracts, etc. Eligible importers selected back in 1957-1958 with virtually no new members added in interim. According our information, criteria used that time were objective-nevertheless probably Can Lao getting "cut" from those profiting import program expanding list undesirable from standpoint efficiency distribution supplies in country-many believe too many importers now either selling import licenses or unable set up internal distribution channels outside major cities. Furthermore no reason to believe expanding number would necessarily reduce Can Lao capacity project. In summary, we sceptical efficacy suggested remedies or virtually any other remedies so long as Nhu is in power and holds sway over Can Lao, and he or those he controls are able exact kickbacks from importers virtually at will. If his power broken, issue Can Lao support could become irrelevant.
- III. With respect to type b issue, our opinion much depends on situation at time we decide resume aid. In present tug of war, two outcomes (with various shadings) possible: (a) favorable change in government or major political concessions by present government; (b) for variety reasons difficult to predict now, we decide resumption aid without any significant improvement our relations. Another dimension to this analysis is an estimate of economic conditions existing at time we resume aid. In any case, it would not be intended permit onset of widespread economic chaos prior to resuming aid.
- IV. If aid resumed after significant favorable political changes and in the wake of serious price rises and plaster value decline, we certainly

would not press for procedural reforms but would rather expedite to maximum input of those aid commodities essential to economy (including refilling pipeline, but not repaying amount lost by suspension). Furthermore, the generally improved nature of our relationships with the government would argue for “detailed consultations and study” rather than imposition of “conditions”.

V. If we resume aid in fear of loss SVN or in atmosphere accommodation welfare populace without settlement outstanding issues with government there would be little leverage for exacting procedural concessions. The same is true at present under aid suspension—GVN not likely be receptive to demands for procedural improvements when smarting under US pressure.

VI. Given above analysis, we suggest Dept consider, along with suggestions contained Embtel 816,³ specific reforms of CIP and remedies against local abuses (taxes, income distribution, land tenure, etc.) be part broader objective changing institutions and bringing into government people with different motivations as prelude discussion and [garble—start?] specific reform measures. To extent we retain leverage for reforms, political climate permits, we would then concentrate on such things as:

- a. Creation of Ministry of Emergency Planning with delegated broad economic powers, under Presidency. This economic czar to have power to impose administrative rulings on all line departments, including National Bank, and to have direct responsibility for only those operations essential to carry out reforms. Areas of concentration would be taxation; exploitation farmers, fishermen and small artisans by middlemen; inefficient government procedure; US foreign aid; joint US-GVN budgeting; marketing policies for rice, fish, fertilizer, etc.
- b. Staffing of the top personnel of the Ministry with people of known competence and integrity, e.g. Dean Thuc, Pho Ba Long, Di Kien Thanh, Hanh of SOFIDIV, Vu Van Thai and others.
- c. Elimination from top posts of incompetent and corrupt officials.
- d. Joint study and consultation on whole range of economic and financial problems.
- e. Increase decentralization of responsibility for execution of policies and greater emphasis on local operational initiative in provinces.

VII. Hopefully, if some of above things achieved, appropriate procedural reforms suggested reftel would flow from them.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, AID (US) S VIET. Secret; Limit Distribution. Received at 6:30 a.m. and passed to the White House at 7:35 a.m.

² In telegram 601, October 18, the Department of State sent the following request to Saigon:

“Request Embassy/USOM/CAS study and report on extent to which Ngo Dinh Nhu reinforces his base of political power and influence through the Commercial Import Program (CIP) and the feasibility of modifying the CIP so as to reduce or eliminate its future contribution to Nhu's influence.” (*Ibid.*)

³ Document 239.

242. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 30, 1963—6:30 p.m.

REF:

CAS Washington [document number not declassified].²

1. We must, of course, get best possible estimate of chance of coup's success and this estimate must color our thinking, but do not think we have the power to delay or discourage a coup. Don has made it clear many times that this is a Vietnamese affair. It is theoretically possible for us to turn over the information which has been given to us in confidence to Diem and this would undoubtedly stop the coup and would make traitors out of us. For practical purposes therefore I would say that we have very little influence on what is essentially a Vietnamese affair. In addition, this would place the heads of the Generals, their civilian supporters and lower military officers on the spot, thereby sacrificing a significant portion of the civilian and military leadership needed to carry the war against the VC to its successful conclusion. After our efforts not to discourage a coup and this change of heart, we would foreclose any possibility of change of the GVN for the better. Diem/Nhu have displayed no intentions to date of a desire to change the traditional methods of control through police action or take any actions which would undermine the power position or solidarity of the Ngo family. This, despite our heavy pressures directed Deptel 534.³ If our attempt to thwart this coup were successful, which we doubt, it is our firm estimate that younger officers, small groups of military, would then engage in an abortive action creating chaos ideally suited to VC objectives.
2. While we will attempt a combined assessment in a following message,⁴ time has not yet permitted substantive examination of this matter with General Harkins. My general view is that the U.S. is trying to bring this medieval country into the 20th century and that we have made considerable progress in military and economic ways but to gain victory we must also bring them into the 20th century politically and that can only be done by either a thoroughgoing change in the behavior of the present government or by another government. The Viet Cong problem is partly military but it is also partly psychological and political.

3. With respect to para 3 ref, I believe that we should continue our present position of keeping hands off but continue to monitor and press for more detailed information. CAS has been analyzing potential coup forces for some time and it is their estimate that the Generals have probably figured their chances pretty closely and probably also expect that once they begin to move, not only planned units, but other units will join them. We believe that Vietnam's best Generals are involved in directing this effort. If they can't pull it off, it is doubtful other military leadership could do so successfully. It is understandable that the Generals would be reticent to reveal full details of their plan for fear of leaks to the GVN.
4. Re para 4 ref, we expect that Conein will meet Don on the night of 30 Oct or early morning 31 Oct. We agree with para 4 ref that we should continue to press for details and question Don as to his estimate of the relative strengths of opposing forces. We do not believe, however, that we should show any signs of attempting to direct this affair ourselves or of giving the impression of second thoughts on this Vietnamese initiation [*initiative*]. In the meantime, we will respond specifically to CAS Washington [*document number not declassified*].⁵ Please note that CAS Saigon [*document number not declassified*]⁶ corrects CAS Saigon 2023⁷ and two regiments of the 7th Division are included in the coup forces.
5. Apparently para 5 ref overlooks CAS [*document number not declassified*] 5 Oct 1963⁸ which gave an account of the face to face meeting of General "Big Minh" and Conein at Minh's instigation and through the specific arrangement of Gen Don. Minh specifically identified Gen Don as participating in a plan to change the government. Please note that Minh's remarks parallel in every way the later statements of Gen Don. We believe that the limitation of contact to Don and Conein is an appropriate security measure consonant with our urging that the smallest number of persons be aware of these details.
6. We do not believe it wise to ask that "Big Minh" pass his plans to Gen Stilwell. The Vietnamese believe that there are members of the U.S. military who leak to the Government of Vietnam. I do not doubt that this is an unjust suspicion but it is a fact that this suspicion exists and there is no use in pretending that it does not.
7. I much appreciate your furnishing the berth equipped military aircraft which I trust is a jet. I intend to tell Pan American that a jet has been diverted for my use and therefore I will no longer need their services. This will undoubtedly leak to the newspapers and the GVN may study this move with some suspicion. I will answer any inquiries

on this score to the effect that I am most pleased by this attention and that this is obviously done as a measure to insure my comfort and save my time. To allay suspicions further, I will offer space on the aircraft to MACV for emergency leave cases, etc, and handle this in as routine a fashion as possible. I wish to reserve comment as to my actual time of departure until I have some additional information, hopefully tomorrow.

8. Your para 7 somewhat perplexes me. It does not seem sensible to have the military in charge of a matter which is so profoundly political as a change of government. In fact, I would say to do this would probably be the end of any hope for a change of government here. This is said impersonally as a general proposition, since Gen Harkins is a splendid general and an old friend of mine to whom I would gladly entrust anything I have. I assume that the Embassy and MACV are able to handle normal activities under a, that CAS can continue coup contacts under b, and as regards c, we must simply do the very best we can in the light of events after the coup has started.
9. We appreciate the steps taken as outlined in para 8. However, we should remember that the GVN is not totally inept in its foreign soundings and that these moves should be as discreet and security conscious as possible. I would, of course, call for these forces only in case of extreme necessity since my hope coincides with the Generals that this will be an all Vietnamese affair.
10. We anticipate that at the outset of the coup, unless it moves with lightning swiftness, the GVN will request me or Gen Harkins to use our influence to call it off. I believe our responsibilities should be that our influence certainly could not be superior to that of the President who is Commander in Chief and that if he is unable to call it off, we would certainly be unable to do so and would merely be risking American lives attempting to interfere in this Vietnamese problem. The government might request aircraft. Helicopters, for the evacuation of key personalities, would have to be studied closely, but we would certainly not commit our planes and pilots between the battle lines of the opposing forces. We should, rather, state that we would be willing to act in this fashion during a truce in which both sides agree to the removal of key personalities. I believe that there would be immediate political problems in attempting to take these personalities to another neighboring country and probably we would be best served in depositing them in Saigon [Saipan?] where the absence of press, communications, etc, would allow us some leeway to make a further decision as to their ultimate disposition. If senior Vietnamese personalities and their families requested asylum in the Embassy or other American installations. We would probably have to grant it in

light of our previous action with respect to Tri Quang. This will undoubtedly present later problems but hopefully the new government might feel disposed to help us solve this problem. Naturally asylum would be granted on the same basis as the Buddhists, i.e., physical presence at the Embassy or other location.

11. As to requests from the Generals, they may well have need of funds at the last moment with which to buy off potential opposition. To the extent that these funds can be passed discreetly, I believe we should furnish them, provided we are convinced that the proposed coup is sufficiently well organized to have a good chance of success. If they are successful, they will undoubtedly ask for prompt recognition and some assurance that military and economic aid will continue at normal level. We should be prepared to make these statements if the issue is clear-cut predicated on our position on the President's stated desire to continue the war against the VC to final victory. VOA might be an important means of disseminating this message. Should the coup fail, we will have to pick up the pieces as best we can at that time. We have a commitment to the Generals from the August episode to attempt to help in the evacuation of their dependents. We should try to live up to this if conditions will permit. American complicity will undoubtedly be charged and there might be some acts taken against specific personalities which we should anticipate and make provision against as best we can. Should the coup prove indecisive and a protracted struggle is in progress, we should probably offer our good offices to help resolve the issue in the interest of the war against the VC. This might hold some benefit in terms of concessions by GVN. We will naturally incur some opprobrium from both sides in our role as mediator. However, this opprobrium would probably be less distasteful than a deadlock which would open the door to the VC. We consider such a deadlock as the least likely possibility of the three.

12.

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

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

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

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Top Secret; Flash; Eyes Only. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2063 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy and repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 7:16 a.m. Also printed in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, Vol. 11, pp. 789-792.

² Document 236.

³ Document 181.

⁴ Not found.

⁵ Document 237.

⁶ See [footnote 4, Document 225](#).

⁷ Document 225.

⁸ Document 177.

243. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 30, 1963—6:30 p.m.

1. In conversation with CAS officer evening of 29 October 1963 Dr. Dang Van Sung, opposition leader and close friend and political collaborator of Dr. Phan Huy Quat, said that for past several months he has been working actively to unify various local groups into cohesive political element. These groups include Sung's front for democratization, elements of the Dai Viet Party, the VNQDD and Duy Dan parties and the Hoa Hao sect. Sung stated that in spite of the historic inability of Vietnamese groups to form a united front, he has made definite progress in bringing these groups together since the present atmosphere is so favorable.
2. Sung said that on the basis of this political spadework he has, apparently as representative of the above groups, been in contact with senior military officers through an intermediary. The purpose of these contacts has been to make political recommendation to the senior officers in case there is a change of regime. According to Sung, the military reaction to the general nature of these recommendations has been assuredly favorable although a final decision as to details of the form and structure of a new government has not been made.
3. Sung stated that his thinking and that of the military officers comprises both short and long range programs. Immediately after a coup d'etat, assuming that it will be executed by the senior military officers, a transitional government would be formed with a General, probably Duong Van Minh, as President. A civilian, perhaps Tran Van Do, would be named Vice President. Sung said he believed that a military officer would be named Minister of National Defense, but that civilians would head all other ministries which would probably be reduced in number for the sake of efficiency. Sung and his colleagues believe that the plethora of ambitious politicians both in and out of South Vietnam make military control of the transitional government mandatory.
4. Sung said that the key feature of the new government would be a quasi-legislative branch known as the group of advisors. This body would have the power to suggest and criticize, but not to overrule decisions of the executive. The advisory group would number twenty-five or thirty members. Ten members would be selected by consultation

between the new government and political personalities and other leaders. The first ten members would include, in addition to some of the present opposition leaders, representatives of labor, different religions, etc. The first ten members would then select another fifteen or twenty members vaguely representing various areas of South Vietnam and including the ethnic minorities and religious sects.

4. Sung said that after the transitional period of six months to one year a new National Assembly would be chosen by free election and that its membership would be limited to about fifty deputies. Sung said that in his contacts with the senior military officers it has been generally agreed that it would be difficult to retain the present size of the National Assembly and still have energetic and capable Deputies; the emphasis will be on quality rather than assuring that every small region of the country is represented. The transitional group of advisors will have as a primary objective the preparation for an effective and democratically chosen National Assembly. Sung said it was also agreed that a true and responsible opposition in the National Assembly was the sine qua non of a new government, and that he envisaged his personal role as the formation of such an opposition. Sung added that it was planned that an effective National Assembly and a genuine opposition party would bring about the dissolution of the present opposition parties (Dai Viet, VNQDD, Vuy Dan, etc.) which he termed obsolete and generally wasteless [*useless?*].
6. Sung said that while the long range goal of a new government would be military victory and economic, social and political reforms leading to democracy, there would be short range measures necessary that perforce would be dictatorial in nature. He mentioned the elimination of the Saigon press (followed by substitution of a responsible press) and the elimination of the present judicial system which he termed a political arm of Diem and Nhu. Sung solicited American support and advice in planning and implementing both the short and long range programs of a new government. In the context of American support and advice, Sung stated that he has been working actively among student elements in Saigon from whose ranks future leaders will be drawn. Following the Buddhist dispute, a clandestine inter-high school committee comprising twenty-one members representing about forty public and private high schools was formed. There are seven Communists on this committee. Sung said he has been asked by other students how to counteract the Communist members, but that in the present atmosphere it has been extremely difficult to provide effective advice and support.
7. Sung disclaimed any knowledge of the timing of a possible coup d'etat, and was reluctant to discuss measures which might be taken to

effect a change of government. He said that he and his colleagues were not participating in the “destructive” aspect of any change, but would bend their energies to getting the country back on the road when there is a change of regime.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIEI Top Secret; Immediate. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2077 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; and repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 10:50 a.m.

244. Memorandum From the Director of the Vietnam Working Group (Kattenburg) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)¹

Washington, October 30, 1963.

SUBJECT

What We Know of Coup Planning, Methods, and Personalities—11:00 a.m., October 30, 1963

Coup Methods

We are actually in the dark as to the methods the Generals and their civilian allies, if any, plan to use. Going back to Conein's conversation with Big Minh on 5 October,² he outlined three possible plans:

- a) assassination of Nhu and Can keeping Diem in office—he said this was the easiest plan to accomplish;
- b) encirclement of Saigon by various military units;
- c) direct confrontation between coup military units and the loyalist military units in Saigon, dividing city into sectors impeding [*sic*] it out pocket by pocket.

Minh also said in the same conversation that he would have to get rid of Nhu, Can and Hieu, that would bring Colonel Tung on his knees before him.

There have been further somewhat more indirect references to assassinations and elimination of the entire Ngo family.

Coup Planning

Don earlier promised Conein that the coup committee had agreed that the complete political and military planning would be turned over for study by Ambassador two days prior to scheduled time for coup (conversation night of 24 October³), but in a conversation with Conein on 28 October,⁴ Don said that possibly plans could only be made available four hours in advance. He questioned Conein closely as to time on 31 October Ambassador would [be] leaving.

As to who is doing the planning, Don indicated to Conein that he was contact man with the Americans, other Generals and division commanders. Kim was doing the political planning and military planning is in the hands of others (presumably Big Minh himself).

Leading Coup Personalities

A. Military:

As early as October 5, Big Minh informed Conein that "among other Generals participating with him in this plan were: Major General Don, Brigadier General Khiem, and Major General Kim."

In their October 24 conversation, Conein told Don that the coup committee included himself, General Minh, General Chieu, and General Kim. (*Note:* General Khiem is here left out and replaced by General Chieu whom we know to have been long in dissidence. In their October 28 conversation, Don told Conein that General Khiem was being very circumspect as he knew he was under suspicion by the President.)

Again on October 28 Don told Conein that General Khanh was cooperating, but not a member of the coup committee; he would "not attempt to take his corps area into dissidence." Don also said the same applied to Generals Tri and Dinh.

In their October 28 conversation, Don told Conein that he would be leaving on the morning of October 29 to see Generals Tri and Khanh to perfect the planning. He cautioned against trusting Lt. Col. Thao whom he said was suspect by the Generals' group.

B. Civilian:

It is clear that certain civilian and oppositionist elements have knowledge of the Generals' coup planning though perhaps not in significant detail. These civilians are predominantly the leaders of the old anti-French, anti-Communist, anti-Diem Nationalist *Dai Viet* group.

Notably they include Bui Diem, the more dynamic of younger Dai Viet leaders; Dang Van Sung and Pham Huy Quat, old-time leaders of the Dai Viet; and Tran Trung Dung, Diem's Defense Secretary from 1955 to November 1960.

In a conversation between Dung and a CAS officer,⁵ the former stated he envisaged a regime headed by Vice President Tho, with Quat as Prime Minister. He singled out the following for cabinet posts; Tran Van Ly (former Governor of Central Vietnam); Phan Quang Dan (long-time oppositionist who spent many years in US); Tran Van Tuyen (a former Cao Dai political adviser); and Pham Khac Suu, another well known *Dai Viet* oppositionist in Saigon. He also mentioned three exiles as worthy of consideration, including Nguyen Huu Chau and Nguyen Ton Hoan.

Military Units Involved

You will receive separate material on this subject.

Political Program

The only reference thus far to a political program was made in Don's conversation with Conein on October 24, in which Don stated that: a) the succeeding government would be civilian; b) it would as soon as possible free non-Communist political prisoners and hold honest elections, and would tolerate the operation of opposition parties; c) there would be complete freedom of religion; and d) it would be pro-Western, but not a vassal of the US, to "carry the war against VC to successful conclusion with Western, particularly American, help."

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries-Vietnam. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Initialed by both Kattenburg and Hilsman.

² See [Document 177](#).

³ See [Document 215](#).

⁴ See [Document 225](#).

⁵ See [Document 229](#).

245. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 30, 1963, 5 p.m.

821. Eyes only for President, pass White House directly. No other distribution whatever. Herewith my weekly report pursuant to Deptel 576² for the week ending Wednesday, October 30.

Question 1: Are we gaining or losing on balance and day by day in the contest with the Viet Cong?

Answer: No major change in military situation during last week. Most noteworthy event which happened to me personally is highly secret statement by Gen Don, Acting Chief, Joint General Staff, that he did not think the war could be won [with] the present government in power before the Americans left and certainly could not be won after that. I continue to think that we can and must continue the present utterly essential holding operation, but that it will take something more than is now being done by the GVN politically and psychologically to get a real victory.

Question 2: Is the government responding at any point to our threefold need for improvement in (a) campaign against VC, (b) internal political developments and (c) actions affecting relations with American people and government?

Answer: On (a) no major change. No specific responses have been received from GVN concerning the military areas which we have cited as needing improvement.

Under (b) no major change other than the activities reported on CAS channel.

Under (c) no major change.

Question 3: What does the evidence suggest on the strengthening or weakening of effectiveness of GVN in relation to its own people?

Answer: A report from the Acting Consul in Hue cites the case of a Vietnamese lady, headmistress of a girls school in Hue, who was still in prison because she had been guilty of writing a letter to the President "almost asking for changes in government" and of having it signed by members of the school faculty. The letter urged the President to exert his leadership to solve the Buddhist problem and to reject the oppressive actions of the lower officials. The American Consul, who took the matter up with the government, was told that as soon as she finished "confessing" the problem would be brought before a military court. Over the last weekend the lady was released, but it is believed that this was done in connection with the visit of the UN delegation and there is speculation as to what will happen to her after the UN delegation leaves. There is no reason to think that this case is extraordinary.

There is also a report of Army officers being asked to make lists of those in their units whose actions are opposed to course taken by government.

Question 4: And more specifically, what effect are we getting from our own actions under Deptel 534³ and what modifications in either direction do you think advisable?

Answer: We are beginning to get some effect from our pressure under 534 but little concrete action. Diem invited me to spend Sunday with him and raised the whole subject of suspension of commodity imports which, I hope, is the start of a dialogue. Thuan later hinted that Diem's overture might be the beginning. Suspension of commodity imports and the cessation of aid to Colonel Tung appear to have impressed GVN with our annoyance as no amount of rhetoric could have done. Perhaps they will propose some steps be taken by them in exchange for our resuming our aid, although I doubt that they will offer anything significant. Whatever they promise to do would be subject to delay and would be difficult to verify.

When we decide the time is ripe for us to resume aid then perhaps I should be authorized to make a statement to Diem explaining that the policies of the GVN had made it very difficult for us to continue aid, but that, although American confidence had been weakened, we nonetheless had concluded that they intended to win the war; that they would be less worried in the future about their own tenure of office, and that, on strength of these assumptions we would resume payments on specific categories released at periodic intervals.

Other reactions were as follows:

- a. Dr. Herbert K. Walther of the USOM education division, who probably sees more Vietnamese students and professors than any other official in the Mission, reports that not once had a professor or a student expressed anything but praise for the U.S. decision to withhold aid to Vietnam. All of his contacts with remarkable unanimity said they welcomed the recent U.S. moves and their only criticism was that it should have been done sooner.
- b. General Don expressed pleasure that Colonel Tung's force had been placed under the Joint General Staff. He was also concerned with devaluation of plaster.
- c. Vice President Tho asked a visitor whether I was strong enough to stand firm in current situation. When told that I was, he replied; "good".
- d. In the market place prices of imported goods continued upward with GVN reportedly controlling flour and condensed milk, as wholesale quantities unavailable. Currency market continues gyrations. Gold which rose 50 percent dropped 12 percent reportedly because large amount smuggled in from Hong Kong last week. Greenbacks steady at 140-150.

Rumors of GVN actions persist, but nothing happens. Reports on licensing not received from GVN since October 17, so unable to determine whether any additional items formerly U.S. financed have been picked up by GVN. Overall picture remains one of confusion among businessmen and civil servants. Some expressions discontent now being heard from trade unions. GVN officials also personally concerned at price movement, combined with rumored threat of salary cut and increased cost of living resulting from having buy noon meal when new working hours go into effect.

I understand there is enough milk to last until December or January. I intend to make this available whenever necessary to assure normal amount for popular consumption.

Finally GVN appears to be off to a good start with the U.N. mission. So far they have allowed them to meet everyone, including imprisoned Buddhists.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Top Secret.
Received at 12:32 p.m. and passed to the White House at 12:45 p.m.

² Document 195.

³ Document 181.

246. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Saigon, October 30, 1963—6:30 p.m.

MAC 2033. 1. Admiral Felt not addee this message but will be provided copy upon his arrival Saigon tomorrow.

2. I now hold copy of Saigon 768² and this amplifies my MAC 2028³ which initially responded to your JCS 4188-63.⁴

3. Saigon 768 was Ambassador Lodge personal report to President in response to Deptel 576⁵ which is possible explanation why I had not seen 768 until one week after dispatch and only then when I requested a copy so that I might intelligently respond to your JCS 4188-63 which referred to 768.

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

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

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

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

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

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

16 Oct: The government has responded at many points when we have cited need for improvement in the campaign against the VC (shift of boundaries; placement of VNSF activities in corps areas under OPCON of corps comdr; reallocation of forces). Additionally Gen Don and Gen Stilwell, my G-3 have spent the last week in the conduct of a Corps by Corps assessment of the present situation with a view to further desirable reallocation of forces. Based on their recommendations I will make further recommendations to Pres. Diem. (for inclusion in ans to para 2(a) Ambassador was advised that US/GVN military relations remain good).

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

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

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

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

Para F of answer to question 1—View of Vice Pres Tho that there are only 15 to 20 all-around hamlets in the area south of Saigon which are really good is ridiculous and indicates need for him to get out of Saigon and visit countryside so as to really know of progress which is being made.

In past two weeks I have visited nine Delta provinces (Tay Ninh, Binh Duong, Hau Nghia, Long An, Kien Phong, Kien Hoa, An Giang, Phong Dinh, Chaong Thien) eight of which are south of Saigon, and I do not find the province chiefs or sector advisors to hold the same views as Vice Pres Tho.

Para H of answer to question 1—I am unable to concur in statement that “one cannot drive as much around the country as one could two years ago”. I believe it will be some time before, if we ever do, experience mass surrenders of the VC. I am unable to concur in statement that VC is “in fact, reckoned at a higher figure than it was two years ago”. I have not observed the signs that hatred of the government has tended to diminish the Army's vigor, enthusiasm and enterprise. I find it difficult to believe the few rumors one hears regarding Generals being paid off with money and flashy cars. Most cars I see in use by Generals are same they have been using for past two years and few if any qualify as flashy to my mind. I do not concur with the evaluation of the 14 October report of the Delta subcommittee of the Committee on Province Rehabilitation⁶ which states that the VC are gaining. Moreover I take exception to the implication that the report represents official country team agency views and is consequently authoritative in the views it presents. Agency representatives on this sub-committee served as individuals in reporting to the COPROR Committee, incidentally there were wide divergencies even among sub-committee members.

COPROR Committee received but did not place its stamp of approval or concurrence on report to its Sub-Committee. COPROR Committee returned the report to its Sub-Committee for rework. Consequently this report has not as yet been submitted to country team nor has it been referred to individual country team agencies for review and/or comment. Any views quoted from this Sub-Committee report therefore have no validity as expressions of country team or individual agency views.

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

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

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

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

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State and Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Attached to the source text was a signed note from Krulak to McGeorge Bundy stating that Taylor asked that this message, which had been shown only to McNamara, be conveyed to Bundy. Also printed in Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition, Vol. 11, pp. 785-787.

² Document 207.

³ Document 240.

⁴ Document 227.

⁵ Document 195.

⁶ The report of this subcommittee of the Saigon Country Team's Committee on Province Rehabilitation has not been found.

247. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Saigon, October 30, 1963, 7 p.m.

MAC 2034. When I said last week I was out of the coup business I did not realize I was going to be out of touch. In fact the Ambassador agreed to keep me informed. So I was a bit shocked when the Ambassador called me today on instructions from Washington to collaborate on reply on message (I don't have the number) seeking further info from here. I was shocked because I had not seen any of the Saigon 20 series [document number not declassified],² 2041³ etc.

I did not know there had been further contacts between Don and Conein. I really did not realize how imminent Don's plan is to implementation.

As we do not know the plan I can not say how good it is. To me it just looked like Don has run down the Army roster indicating troops to be used.

How the 21st, 9th, 7th, 23rd, and 5th Divisions can lend any immediate support to an effort in Saigon is hard to visualize. If they are brought into the area the V.C. will certainly take advantage and I can not guess how long it would take to reestablish G.V.N. in the abandoned areas. If he plans to use only the loyal local troops the effort may well be a flop.

I read the Ambassador's reply⁴ to today's message and non-concurred that we should go along feeling we should have more information. Even though Don says his effort is purely Vietnamese, U.S. will soon be involved whether we like it or not. I feel we should go along with only a sure thing: This or continue to go along with Diem until we have exhausted all pressures. The prestige of the U.S. is really involved one way or the other and it must be upheld at all costs.⁵

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State and Defense Cables. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to

Bangkok for Felt. Attached to the source text was a signed note from Krulak to McGeorge Bundy stating that Taylor asked that this message, which had been shown only to McNamara, be conveyed to Bundy.

² Document 226.

³ Document 229.

⁴ Document 242.

⁵ JCS 4230-63, from Taylor to Harkins, October 31, reads as follows:

"Refs: MAC 2028, 2033, 2034.

"References most useful here and are receiving attention at highest levels. CAS Washington [*document number not declassified*] is designed to clear the air and further clarify USG position. Regards." (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Top Secret Cables, October 1963 (B))

The cable referred is [Document 249](#).

248. Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, October 30, 1963—12:25 p.m.

Harriman said he had had a talk after Bundy left about Lodge and the Embassy. Harriman said he had been reading the telegrams.² McNamara was indignant Harkins was not asked about military assessment .³ Harriman said Harkins' assessment is not accurate. Harriman said he thought Bundy should bear this in mind in connection with what he might say. Harriman said he had a great deal of misgivings about the competence of Harkins' staff. He said he thought Trueheart has done a good job.

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Dolores P Perruso of Harriman's staff.

² Apparent reference to [Documents 240](#), [246](#), and [247](#).

³ Ellipsis in the source text.

249. Telegram From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)¹

Washington, October 30, 1963—5:49 p.m.

1. Our reading your thoughtful 2063² leads us to believe a significant difference of shading may exist on one crucial point (see next para) and one or two lesser matters easily clarified.
2. We do not accept as a basis for U.S. policy that we have no power to delay or discourage a coup. In your paragraph 12 you say that if you were convinced that the coup was going to fail you would of course do everything you could to stop it. We believe that on this same basis you should take action to persuade coup leaders to stop or delay any operation which, in your best judgment, does not clearly give high prospect of success. We have never considered any betrayal of Generals to Diem, and our [*document number not declassified*]³ explicitly rejected that course. We recognize the danger of appearing hostile to Generals, but we believe that our own position should be on as firm ground as possible, hence we cannot limit ourselves to proposition implied in your message that only conviction of certain failure justifies intervention. We believe that your standard for intervention should be that stated above.
3. Therefore, if you should conclude that there is not clearly a high prospect of success, you should communicate this doubt to Generals in a way calculated to persuade them to desist at least until chances are better. In such a communication you should use the weight of U.S. best advice and explicitly reject any implication that we oppose the effort of the Generals because of preference for present regime. We recognize need to bear in mind Generals' interpretation of U.S. role in 1960 coup attempt, and your agent should maintain clear distinction between strong and honest advice given as a friend and any opposition to their objectives.
4. We continue to be deeply interested in up-to-the-minute assessment of prospects and are sending this before reply to our [*document number not declassified*]⁴. We want continuous exchange latest assessments on this topic.
5. To clarify our intent, paragraph 7 of our [*document number not declassified*]⁵ is rescinded and we restate our desires as follows:

- a. While you are in Saigon you will be chief of country team in all circumstances and our only instruction is that we are sure it will help to have Harkins fully informed at all stages and to use advice from both him and *[less than 1 line not declassified]* in framing guidance for coup contacts and assessment. We continue to be concerned that neither Conein nor any other reporting source is getting the clarity we would like with respect to alignment of forces and level of determination among Generals.
 - b. When you leave Saigon and before there is a coup, Trueheart will be chief of the country team. Our only modification of existing procedures is that in this circumstance we wish all instructions to Conein to be conducted in immediate consultation with Harkins and *[less than 1 line not declassified]* so that all three know what is said to Conein. Any disagreement among the three on such instructions should be reported to Washington and held for our resolution, when time permits.
 - c. If you have left and a coup occurs, we believe that emergency situation requires, pending your return, that direction of country team be vested in most senior officer with experience of military decisions, and that officer in our view is Harkins. We do not intend that this switch in final responsibility should be publicized in any way, and Harkins will of course be guided in basic posture by our instructions, which follow in paragraph 7. Thus we do not believe that this switch will have the effect suggested in your paragraph 8.
6. This paragraph contains our present standing instructions for U.S. posture in the event of a coup.
- a. U.S. authorities will reject appeals for direct intervention from either side, and U.S.-controlled aircraft and other resources will not be committed between the battle lines or in support of either side, without authorization from Washington.
 - b. In event of indecisive contest, U.S. authorities may in their discretion agree to perform any acts agreeable to both sides, such as removal of key personalities or relay of information. In such actions, however, U.S. authorities will strenuously avoid appearance of pressure on either side. It is not in the interest of USG to be or appear to be either instrument of existing government or instrument of coup.
 - c. In the event of imminent or actual failure of coup, U.S. authorities may afford asylum in their discretion [to] those to whom there is any express or implied obligation of this sort. We believe however that in such a case it would be in our interest and probably in interest of those seeking asylum that they seek protection of other

Embassies in addition to our own. This point should be made strongly if need arises.

- d. But once a coup under responsible leadership has begun, and within these restrictions, it is in the interest of the U.S. Government that it should succeed.
7. We have your message⁶ about return to Washington and we suggest that all public comment be kept as low-key and quiet as possible, and we also urge that if possible you keep open the exact time of your departure. We are strongly sensitive to great disadvantage of having you out of Saigon if this should turn out to be a week of decision, and if it can be avoided we would prefer not to see you pinned to a fixed hour of departure now.⁷

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Flash; Eyes only. The source text is CAS telegram [document number not declassified] to Saigon. Repeated to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes; to Honolulu eyes only for Felt; and to the CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Also printed in United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967, Book 12, pp. 604-605.

² Document 242.

³ Document 236.

⁴ Document 237.

⁵ Document 236.

⁶ Apparent reference to telegram 825 from Saigon, October 10, in which Lodge informed the Department that he would fly directly from Saigon to Washington on the plane provided by the Department of Defense, arriving in Washington on November 2 and returning to Vietnam on November 5 or 6. (Department of State, Central Files, PER-LODGE, HENRY CABOT)

⁷ In telegram [*document number not declassified*], October 30, Lodge acknowledged these instructions as follows: "Thanks your sagacious instruction. Will carry out to best of my ability." (*Ibid.*, POL 26 S VIET)

250. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)
to the Department of State¹

Saigon, October 31, 1963—5:40 p.m.

1. A provisional analysis of past coup reporting indicates that various dissident officers have been slowly getting together, establishing contacts with other groups, and by evolutionary process this now appears to be congealing primarily behind the Generals.
2. Among the dissident elements of which we are aware are the following:
 - a. The Tran Kim Tuyen group, which in itself was an amalgam of military, civilian nationalist, Buddhist and student groups. Organization was extensive and well compartmented.
 - b. The Lt Col Pham Ngoc Thao/Huynh Van Lang group which developed military support, established liaison with and now reportedly has partially merged with and trying to take the leadership of the Tuyen group.
 - c. A group of Central Vietnamese military officers who appear to be a part of the the Generals coup, headed by Gen Le Van Nghiem, with Generals Pham Xuan Chieu, Le Van Kim, Tran Van Minh, Nguyen Ngoc Le, and Duong Van Hinh as part of the upper structure. It was supposedly paralleled by group of Northern and Southerm officers under Gens Chieu and Kim respectively. While little is known of the overall direction, some unit support was identified.
 - d. The United Front Party, described by Bui Thngt [*sic*] Long Hy, which is organized into three-man cells of intellectuals and professionals, with the aim of overthrowing the Diem regime. This may be one of the segments of the Tuyen group.
 - e. The Dai Viet element, represented by Bui Diem, working with the Generals. Conversation with Dang Van Sung and Tran Trung Dung indicate they are very knowledgeable and, we suspect, participant.
 - f. The Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang element of Nguyen Van Luc who very early established contact with and promised support for the Tuyen group, and the Thao/Lang group have been trying to exploit them.
 - g. We have had several reports indicating Colonels, and junior officers, particularly from Airborne, Marines, and Armor, were discussing a coup among themselves.

- h. The group of Major Nguyen Van Bich, reportedly DCO of 23rd Division, who came to our attention through Du Phnoc Long of the Press Liaison Bureau, which wished to develop a redoubt area near the Cambodian border. Long's involvement may indicate that this was an element of Tuyen's group which may have lost contact with other elements with Tuyen's departure. Other comments of Long indicate it may also have been an element of the Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang. Long stated later that events had left these plans behind.
 - i. The group of Nguyen Huu Duong, a govt attorney, has many contacts in both the civilian and military sides. This group worked parallel with the Tudo group, both having many contacts with students. Duong's group and the Tudo group were interdependent and were associated with the Tuyen group.
 - j. The Generals' group, headed by Duong Van Minh with Tran Van Don as spokesman and Le Van Kim as political organizer. Most of the above groups now appear to be involved with this group. Elements of a, c, e, f, and g, have been identified with the Generals. In addition there is considerable duplication of units claimed by the Generals and the Thao/Lang group.
 - k. Pham Huy Co's Territorial Action Committee, clearly planning overthrow of regime, has been active in psywar, has some civilian organization; no real indication of broad military support, but there is no indication yet that it constitutes a unified coup mechanism.
3. We feel that most coup activity now centers around the Thao/ Lang group on the one hand and the Generals' group on the other, and the question may well be who will lead the units anxious to participate. Both groups seek to use many of the same units with the Generals' group appearing to be better and more broadly organized. If the Thao/Lang group move first, they must hope for defections from the evident opposition, support from units whose loyalty they are not sure of, or a swift action which quickly eliminates the Ngo family. Even if successful, it is not at all certain they can implement their political program. We believe that if the Generals move first, the power will be with them and the Thao/Lang group would be forced to lend the support of what little is distinctively their own. The Generals reportedly do not plan to bring in Thao from the start as they distrust him, but are willing to use him.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2114 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman,

Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt and to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. Received at the Department of State at 9:33 a.m.

251. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Director of the National Security Agency (Blake)¹

Saigon, November 1, 1963—2:24 p.m.

DTG 010624Z November. Critic. At 1345H General Don telephoned Stilwell, J-3 and stated in the clear all (*sic*)² Generals were assembled with him at JGS HQ and were initiating a coup. Stilwell asked if timing was immediate and was told yes. Don asked that I be informed at once.

I notified Ambassador at 1400. He had just received info that Marine unit had seized the PTT. CAS reports unidentified elms have seized central Police station.

Army elms (presumably 3rd Airborne Bn) are on road from airfield to Saigon. Reports of fighting at Special Forces HQ adjacent to JGS.

Ambassador and I have directed AFRS to broadcast warning to US personnel to stay off streets in view reported civil disturbances.

Numerous troop movements reported this morning. All details later. Will keep you advised.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Flash. The source text is the copy sent for information Flash to the Department of State. Also sent for information Flash to USIB agencies. Received at the Department of State at 1:44 a.m.

² As on the source text.

252. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency
Station in Saigon to the Director of the National Security
Agency (Blake)¹

Saigon, November 1, 1963.

2. Critic. Fm: Conein at JGS HQS² from Gens Big Minh and Don and eye witness observation:

Following are prisoners at JGS:

Col Tung, Police Commissioner Tu, Air Force Commander Hien, Airborne Commander Col Vien, Marine Commander Khang, Civil Guard Commander Lam. Navy Commander Quyhn, killed morning 1 Nov in premature action by Navy.

Gens attempting contact Palace by telephone but unable to do so. Their proposition as follows: If the President will resign immediately, they will guarantee his safety and the safe departure of the President and Ngo Dinh Nhu. If the President refuses these terms, the Palace will be attacked within the hour by Air Force and Armor.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret Flash. The source text is the copy sent for information Flash to the Department of State. Also sent for information Flash to USIB agencies. Received at the Department of State at 2:34 a.m.

² According to the Acting Chief of Station in Saigon, the decision to send Conein to the JGS headquarters was made by the Saigon Station and not by Washington. (Department of State, Office of the Historian, Vietnam Interviews, October 11, 1984)

253. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 1, 1963, 3 p.m.

842. Department pass ACSI and DIA. As reported through separate channels,² coup d'etat commenced at about 1345.³ Salient developments as of 1500 are as follows:

1. General Don has confirmed in two separate messages to us that coup underway.
2. Telecommunications center of Ministry of Interior taken by coup forces, believed to be Marines.
3. Little firing in streets.
4. Col. Tung Commander Vietnamese Special Forces reported captured and persuaded issue cease fire order to Special Forces.
5. Presidential Guard fully deployed around Palace but no firing this area.
6. Minister Thuan, Minister of Economy Thanh, Minister of Finance Luong are all at Italian Ambassador's apartment.
7. 103 truckloads of troops reported entering Saigon over bridge from Bien Hoa.
8. Col Tung, Police Commissioner, Chief Air Force, Air Force Commander, Civil Guard Comdr, all captives at Joint General Staff Headquarters. Navy Commander reported killed in premature action by Navy this morning.
9. Coup Generals have attempted get through to Palace to issue ultimatum to Diem guaranteeing safe conduct out of country for Diem and Nhu if they capitulate within one hour. Unable get through. General Don says he will issue proclamation concerning coup by radio within the hour.
10. Condition Gray declared and Americans alerted over radio AFRS to stay indoors.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIEI Confidential; Flash. Repeated Flash to CINCPAC. Received at 2:15 a.m. and passed to

the White House, CIA, Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the Defense Intelligence Agency at 3:20 a.m.

² CIA Critic 1, November 1, received at the Department of State at 2:15 a.m. (*Ibid.*)

³ According to interviews with Lucien Conein and others October 11 and April 14, 1984, respectively, Nhu attempted a last ditch ploy to save his brother's government. As the Americans of ficals remember it, Nhu was generally aware of coup plotting at the end of October, "that the elephants were crashing about in the jungle and some were getting pretty close to him." Nhu concluded that the only way to turn the situation around was to show the United States that he and his brother were the "only saviors of Vietnam." Nhu arranged with General Dinh, military commander of the Saigon military district, to stage a fake Viet Cong uprising in Saigon. Included in the plan was the assassination of key U.S. officials. Nhu then planned to send "loyal" troops from Dinh's contingent to put down the revolt, restore order, and save Vietnam. But Dinh had been won over to the coup plotters' side and he told his rebel colleagues of Nhu's plans. As Conein described it, the Generals' "double bumped" Nhu. When the actual coup began, Nhu was under the impression that it was the staged uprising he had planned with Dinh. (*Ibid.*, Office of the Historian, Vietnam Interviews)

254. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 1, 1963, 1 p.m.

2129. Ref: CAS Washington [*document number not declassified*].²

1. Following comments keyed to units named in ref:
2. President Guard: Concur. Guard has estimated strength of 18 M-24 tanks, four M-114 and four M-113 armored personnel carriers. Guard lacks combat experience of such units as Airborne and Marines.
3. Airborne brigade: Commanders of 3rd, 5th, 7th and 8th Btns all reportedly close to Major Ho Tieu, Airborne DCO and COs, whom we believe most likely prospect to organize airborne support for coup. However, CO of 3rd is weak and not likely to participate. The 1st Btn is reported as part of coup force organized by Tran Kim Tuyen. The 1st and 7th Btn CO's have been critical of regime to their advisors. Contrary to report of Tuyen's coup group, we consider 6th Btn CO most loyal to the regime. CAS has report he may be relieved shortly for incompetence. In Airborne, as in Marine Brigade, Btns constantly being shifted for tactical reasons. On 31st October 1st Btn in new Hau Nghia Province; 3rd Btn on alert at Tan Son Nhut; 5th and 7th Btns in Binh Duong Province; 8th Btn in Kien Hoa Province; and 6th Btn going into training at Vung Tau.
4. Marine Brigade: 2nd and 3rd Btns in Saigon area; First and Fourth Btns on operation in Binh Duong Province. Brigade CO Le Nguyen Khang reportedly disaffected since beginning Buddhist crisis and CAS information indicates Khang waiting on coup but willing to sit it out. Capt Ma Viet Bang, CO 3rd Btn, reported disaffected and coup-minded, along with Tran Van Nhut, CO 1st Btn.
5. Armor: In addition to Presidential Guard Armor, other Armor units in Saigon include the 2nd Plt, 1st Co, 2nd Squadron (five M-24 tanks) at Tan Son Nhut; 3rd Plt, 1st Co, 2nd Sqdr (five M-24 tanks) at JGS; two M-113's, two M-24's; and six M-8's at 1st Sqdr HQS, Go yap; the 5th Mech Rifle Co, 1st Sqdr, in Saigon area; two pits of 1st Tank Co, 1st Sqdr (about 10 tanks) in Saigon area; one pit, 1st Tank Co, 1st Sqdr (about five tanks) at Bien Hoar and 4th Co, 4th Sqdr (15 M-113) at Go yap. CAS reports indicate that Fifth Co, 1st Armor Sqdr, most likely to join a coup having promised support to Tuyen coup group, working with Major Nguyen Van Tu, CO, 8th Rgt, Binh Duong Prov. First

Tank Co, 1st Sqdr, has figured in coup reporting without indicating if company CO involved. An armor company from 2nd Armor Sqdr has been reported as involved in coup. This unit was reportedly brought to Saigon area at the arrangement of Gen Tran Thien Khiem, ostensibly for counter-coup activity. Two CAS sources report that Armor School Commander promises between 40 and 50 vehicles including tanks and armored personnel carriers. The school is located at Long Hai and has total of 35 armored vehicles of which four are currently dead-lined and eight are in poor condition. If additional truck transport available to the school were included, the number of vehicles could fall into the reported range. One senior Armor staff officers has stated he will lead elements of 1st Sqdr Armor and a portion of the Presidential Guard Armor in a coup.

6. Special Forces: Some Special Forces officers have indicated feeling of dissidence with the regime, but we concur that they must be carried as a loyal element in terms of organized force. Four companies of Special Forces are not in the Saigon area at present.
7. We concur that the uniformed police constitute a negligible factor. The Combat Police, while trained in riot control have not been called upon to stand up under fire. The coup forces claim they can split the Combat Police.
8. Fifth Division: The regimental commanders have long been claimed dissident by coup organizers including Tuyen, and the division CO, Col Nguyen Van Thieu, has recently been reported by CAS sources as joining the coup. He has been frequently reported as friendly with some of the participant Generals. The Seventh Regiment is the least committed in fighting at present. The CO 8th Regiment (Maj Tu) has been named by a number of CAS sources as participant in coup plotting, and he is supported by his btn commanders. Although the current situation is unknown, 8th Rgt was to provide one to two btns to come to the relief of the regime in the event of a coup, but these btns planned to switch sides upon arrival at Saigon. Lack of transport may make it difficult for more than one btn of any rat to be moved at a time.
9. Seventh Division: Col Dam is reported dissident but we regard him as weak and not likely to commit himself. His deputy, Lt Col Nguyen Van Tu, appears to be the stronger personality and has been reported as a part of coup plotting by several sources. Tuyen claimed Tu was to lead counter-coup forces from the division to Saigon following the eruption of his coup, and join the coup. Seventh has only three mobile battalions.
10. Air Force: Dissidence is very widespread and in spite of Col Hien's loyalty, we believe the coup group can gain control by eliminating

Hien and having Lt Col Nguyen Cao Ky, backed by Lt Col Do Khac Mai, assume control. We are reluctant to relegate the Air Force as a strictly secondary force. They could prove a decisive factor if turned loose against Gia Long Palace, and would also be of assistance as an interdiction force against loyal elements moving on Saigon.

11. Miscellaneous units: We agree that these are generally insignificant with a few exceptions. The 3rd Bt, 46th Rgt, as [has?] the defense of Bien Hoa Air Base where the nearest fighter squadron is located and one report claims it is involved in the coup. In addition, counter-coup forces are reportedly to be brought in from Quang Trung and Thu Duc Training Centers. Tuyen claimed he had subverted these forces as well.
12. The units in the field can be expected to have sufficient ammunition for the coup. Although ARVN gasoline allotments recently decreased, reserves are adequate for any coup-related troop movements. Transportation also can be assumed available for field units.
13. It should be pointed out that we have not been given the coup plans nor a rundown on coup forces. General Don states he has nothing to do with the military preparations in the organization of a compartmented coup program. What information Don gave Conein was in response to specific attempts at elicitation by Conein and Don's replies were vague, Don claiming he was passing on only some of the details he had overheard. Thus, we are unable to adequately assess the viability of the coup group. The basic questions are whether the Generals have the courage and competence to mount a coup successfully. They are basically cautious and it appears unlikely they would move without expecting success.
14. MACV comment:
 - a. The unit strengths and dispositions contained in this message have been furnished by the MACV staff. It is to be noted that all but three battalions of each of the 5th and 7th Divisions are committed to operational missions, which cannot be foregone without creating a serious security problem for the population.
 - b. MACV has inadequate information on which to base an evaluation of the motivations attributed by CAS to the military personnel cited in this message.
 - c. MACV has no info from advisory personnel which could be interpreted as clear evidence of an impending coup.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. Sent eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and

Hughes. Received at the Department of State at 3:18 a.m. Also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for Bundy; and repeated to CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms and to Honolulu and Hong Kong eyes only for Felt.

² Document 237.

255. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 1, 1963-4 p.m.

853. Department pass ACSI and DIA. Embassy telegram 842.² Generals have refused to deal directly with Palace re ultimatum. In effect they have asked Embassy to relay message at our option. We have requested Acting Papal Delegate to attempt to get message through to Palace. Meantime ground and air attack on Palace underway.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Confidential; Flash. Repeated Flash to CINCPAC. Received at the Department of State at 3:19 a.m. and passed to the White House at 3:25 a.m. and to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and CIA at 3:39 a.m.

² Document 253.

256. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency
Station in Saigon to the Director of the National Security
Agency (Blake)¹

Saigon, November 1, 1963.

6. Critic. Conein reports from JGS Gens firmly decided there to be no discussion with the President. He will either say yes or no and that is the end of the conversation.

CAS officer observed four AD-6 fighter bombers with munitions aboard at approx 10,000 ft over Saigon at 1515.

Heavy fighting including armor, small arms, and possibly some light artillery vicinity Palace as of 1530 furs.

Conein reports from JGS Gens have monitored radio broadcast from Palace to First and Second Corps and 21st Division. Broadcast states coup attempted in Saigon but all insurgents arrested. Can hear fighting from Embassy. Can confirm insurgents not arrested.

As of 1535, 105 fire reported Palace vicinity.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Flash. The source text is the copy sent for information Flash to the Department of State. Also sent Flash to USIB agencies. Received at the Department of State at 3:40 a.m.

257. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency
Station in Saigon to the Director of the National Security
Agency (Blake)¹

Saigon, November 1, 1963.

8. Critic. Conein reports from JGS that Gens have group of nationalistic anti-Communist pro-Western civilian politicians with them at JGS. These individuals will head the new civil administration. There will be no military personalities in high positions in the new government. Military hopes to turn over government to the civilians within two to three days.

Gens have taped a proclamation for broadcast and have taken over VTVN studios. However, one relay point apparently blown up, and broadcast of proclamation delayed.

Now at JGS are Gens "Big" Minh and "Little" Minh, Khiem, Kim, Le, and Chieu. Gens claim Gen Khanh and Gen Tri also supporting coup. Gens report Bien Hoa and My Tho have been taken by forces loyal to them.

Now heavy firing vicinity Embassy. AAA going up. Apparently duel going on between aircraft and ships in river.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Flash. The source text is the copy sent for information Flash to the Department of State. Also sent Flash to USIB agencies. Received at the Department of State at 3:55 a.m.

258. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency
Station in Saigon to the Director of the National Security
Agency (Blake)¹

Saigon, November 1, 1963, 5 p.m.

2. DTG 0-00Z. Conein at JGS reports Big Minh called President on telephone but President allegedly not present and Big Minh spoke to Nhu. In order show strength all Gens present including in addition to those previously named, Gen La, Gen Tam, Gen Oai, and Gen Ngoc. In addition, Col Lam of the CG, Col Khang of the Marines and Col Khuong also spoke to Nhu on the telephone. In addition, Col Tung was forced at gun point to announce that he a prisoner. Air Force Commander did not speak. Conein believes he has been eliminated. Big Minh stated to Nhu that if the President and Nhu did not resign, turn themselves over to the coup forces within five minutes, the Palace will sustain a massive airborne bombardment. At this, Gen Minh hung up.²

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Flash The source text is the copy sent for information Flash to the Department of State. Also sent Flash to USIB agencies. Received at the Department of State at 4:11 a.m.

² In the next telegram in this series, CAS Saigon 3, DTG 0-21Z, November 1, the Station relayed the following information on a second Big Minh-Diem telephone conversation:

"Conein reports from JGS that Gen Big Minh once more called President Diem and Diem hung up as of 1715 hours. Minh has given the order to bomb the Palace. This apparently refutes radio announcements that President has resigned which broadcasted approx 1710 hr." (*Ibid.*)

259. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 1, 1963, 6 p.m.

860. At 4:30 a telephone call [came] from President Diem and the following conversation occurred:

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

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

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

Lodge: You have certainly done your duty. As I told you only this morning,² I admire your courage and your great contributions to your country. No one can take away from you the credit for all you have done. Now I am worried about your physical safety. I have a report that those in charge of the current activity offer you and your brother safe conduct out of the country if you resign. Had you heard this?

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

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

Diem: I am trying to re-establish order.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Flash; Limit Distribution. Received at the Department of State at 5:11 a.m. and passed to the White House, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and CIA

at 5:31 a.m. Printed in part in *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Book 3, pp. 57-58.

² See [Document 262](#).

260. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency
Station in Saigon to the Director of the National Security
Agency (Blake)¹

Saigon, November 1, 1963—6:53 p.m.

7. DTG 011053Z. Critic. From reliable source at JGS from Gen Big Minh: The moment of decision has arrived, troops are moving on Gia Long and expect to take possession of the Palace by 1900 hours. They are prepared for a counter move. Gens are very hopeful for early recognition of their new govt by the United States and other Western powers. Military will not retain power. Gen Minh repeated this several times. Will turn over to civilian control within two or three days if possible and will bend every effort to make sure civilian control is complete within one week. When the coup is completed, possibly on the night of 1 Nov the Gens will come to the Embassy and ask Thich Tri Quang to join the new govt. They will not attempt to force Thich Tri Quang in any way. He will be given free choice to join up or abstain.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Flash. The source text is the copy sent Flash to the Department of State. Also sent Flash to USIB agencies. Received at the Department of State at 6:08 a.m.

261. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 1, 1963, 5 p.m.

854. CINCPAC for POLAD.

1. Admiral Felt, Minister Martin, Embassy interpreter and I met with Diem from 10:00 am until 11:15 today. Afterwards I spoke alone with Diem for 20 minutes (see separate telegram).²
2. Diem began with monologue covering in somewhat condensed manner same ground covered in September 29 conversation with McNamara, Taylor, Harkins and myself. See Embassy memcon forwarded under Embassy Airgram A-244 dated October 3.³
3. Diem added following with unusual directness:
 - a. Junior CIA officers were poisoning atmosphere by spreading rumors of coups against him. Said one such officer, Hodges has recently told General Staff that GVN planning demonstration against American Embassy. Hodges had remarked that if this happened, Seventh Fleet would fend, etc. Diem remarked Hodges clearly knew more about this than he did but added that enemy would take advantage such rumors. Said two Viet Cong killed south of Saigon October 23 had on person VC plans for taking advantage of any coup attempt to seize Saigon.
 - b. USG plan to withhold aid would hurt war effort, would work special hardship on soldiers and unpaid Strategic Hamlet guards (Combatant Youths). He planned measures to protect them economically as much as possible. Further lamented cutoff of aid in flour and especially in milk.
 - c. USG was entirely wrong in withholding subsidy for Special Forces. These forces were not independent, as USG seemed to allege, but were directly subordinated to ARVN General Staff, which had directed their use in action against pagodas August 21 after ARVN senior officers had unanimously told Diem such action necessary. Added lamely that USG may have gotten false impression of Special Forces independence because their particular type of mission often involved them in action crossing normal division or corps sectors borders.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET. Secret; Priority. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 7:26 a.m. and passed to the White House at 8:35 a.m.

² Document 262.

³ Document 158.

262. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 1, 1963, 3 p.m.

841. The Palace notified me early Friday morning that President Diem wanted to see me alone for fifteen minutes after the interview with Admiral Felt.² After the Admiral had gone, President Diem said:

1. The Buddhist bonzes, spurred on by American agents and who, under American stimulus, had created a so-called pagoda, have now received the UN Commission and have told them that they were the victims of "intoxication" by Americans. (I would translate the French word "intoxication" as "having been bulldozed by the Americans"). In particular one bonze [*less than 1 line not declassified*] admitted the falsity of the document which they had circulated and had attributed to the GVN. Another bonze [*less than 1 line not declassified*] admitted the false rumors of a coup d'etat which he had started and cited a number of American names. The UN Commission wanted to have the names. Brother Nhu had suggested last night that the American names be withheld because, after all, we were allies and we did not want to wash our dirty linen in public. GVN would, however, furnish the Embassy with the names.
2. I said that I hoped we would get the names and that he could be sure that if any American had committed an impropriety, I would send him out of the country.
3. Diem then spoke of a number of small student groups who had been worked on by the Communists and who intended to throw hand grenades and plastic bombs while the UN Commission was here. It was for this reason that he had kept the universities closed. But as soon as the UN Commission leaves, the universities will be opened "little by little" ("au fur et a mesure").
4. Diem repeated what he said to Admiral Felt that the Special Forces were really under the Joint General Staff and that it was a very serious thing to cut off the Special Forces from the people who were dependent upon the [garble] North Vietnam and who needed their support. He said General Harkins is a fine man but some of his advisors were not liked. He spoke particularly of former American Colonel Vann whom he said was very imprudent.

5. Then he spoke about suggestions to change the government which was all very well but who should be brought into the government? Whenever he asked that, nobody could give him any names. Also the question of timing was very important. He intended to do it at the proper time.
6. He hoped that when I was in Washington, I would ask Mr. Colby of CIA and former Ambassador Nolting about brother Nhu because the fact was that brother Nhu did not wish power but that he had such a flexible spirit and was always so full of good advice that people would ask him for his advice. When they had a difficult problem, brother Nhu would always find a solution. Mr. Colby had come to President Diem and had said that it was too bad that brother Nhu was living in an ivory tower, he should go out more. Ambassador Nolting had agreed and it was "due to their pressure" that brother Nhu had started going out and making himself known. But then when he did go out, people said he was usurping power and it was then all the bad publicity began.
7. When I got up to go, he said: Please tell President Kennedy that I am a good and a frank ally, that I would rather be frank and settle questions now than talk about them after we have lost everything. (This looked like a reference to a possible coup.) Tell President Kennedy that I take all his suggestions very seriously and wish to carry them out but it is a question of timing.
8. Comment: I feel that this is another step in the dialogue which Thuan thought Diem had begun at our meeting in Dalat on Sunday night.³ If U.S. wants to make a package deal, I would think we were in a position to do it. The conditions of my return could be propitious for it. In effect he said: Tell us what you want and we'll do it. Hope to discuss this in Washington. See also Nhu's statement on release of all Buddhists and students now in jail.

On a personal basis, as soon as Admiral Felt had left the room, I said that I could assure Diem that these rumors of assassination had not in any way affected my feeling of admiration and personal friendship for him or for Vietnam. I had long admired his courage before coming to Saigon and since getting to know him, I formed sentiments of friendship for him. I was grateful to him for being so extremely nice to my wife and me. This was something which no amount of false rumors could possibly affect.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, SOC 14-1 S VIET/UN. Secret; Priority. Received at 9:18 a.m. and passed to the White House at 9:37 a.m. William Colby, in *Honorable Men*, p. 215, describes this cable and notes that because it was sent only priority, it arrived in Washington well after the coup had begun.

² See [Document 261](#).

³ See [Document 221](#).

263. Memorandum for the Record of Discussion at the Daily White House Staff Meeting¹

Washington, November 1, 1963, 8 a.m.

1. Mr. Bundy presided throughout the meeting.
2. *Vietnam*. Bundy opened the meeting by stating that "they" (presumably himself and Forrestal) had spent a quiet night watching the cables from Vietnam. I asked how many forces were actually involved, hoping to draw out some of Bundy's thinking. He responded by saying that, with the exception of the palace guard, the army in Saigon and in the field seem to be firmly behind the Generals. Forrestal added that it was a well executed coup, much better than anyone would have thought possible. Bundy then commented that Diem was still holding out in the palace, adding that no one wanted to go in for the kill. They preferred that Diem leave the country. He continued that the Lodge trip is obviously off, and concluded by saying that all we could do for the present was continue to watch. At one point Dungan jokingly said that if we recognized this military regime quickly, it would put him in trouble in Latin America. Someone responded that the group in Vietnam was "representative." Bundy, I believe, added that this was an example of the acceptable type of military coup Martin of State had in mind when he made his statement some weeks ago.²

[Here follows discussion of matters unrelated to Vietnam.]

¹ Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by W.Y. Smith.

² Reference is to Edwin M. Martin, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, and his statement written for and published in the New York Herald Tribune, October 6, 1963. The statement is also printed in Department of State Bulletin, November 4, 1963, pp. 698-704.

264. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, November 1, 1963—10:50 a.m.

673. For Lodge from Secretary. Ref CAS Saigon [document number not declassified].²

1. If coup succeeds, recognition problem will be urgent. Of course, you would expect to deal in friendly and cooperative fashion with effective authorities from the outset but timing of our announcement of formal recognition might be delayed for brief period. Since coup is wholly Vietnamese, Generals should understand that false recognition by the United States in advance of other governments would falsely brand their action as American-inspired and manipulated. Since Generals plan to establish a government within two or three days, formal recognition might better await that action.
2. Re CAS Saigon critic 04³ and CAS Saigon critic 07.⁴ Tri Quang is of course free to come and go as he pleases.
3. However, after studying reports of Embassy conversations with Tri Quang we are somewhat uneasy about his political orientation and as to effects of his strong anti-Catholic views on political stance of new government.
4. On balance we are inclined to believe intention coup group designate Tri Quang as Buddhist adviser new government makes better sense than his inclusion in Cabinet as minister with significant portfolio. Giving him specific responsibilities limited to Buddhists has two advantages in our view, (a) it reassures Buddhists; and (b) it does not frighten Catholics or other groups which would be concerned by prospect overzealous Buddhist reaction to Diem-Nhu repression. At same time, advisory position for Tri Quang with new government would avail Generals Tri Quang's considerable talents without prejudicing non-denominational stance new government.
5. Regarding reftel, we assume Generals leading coup will not call on you in large group, thus giving false impression they were reporting to headquarters. A certain formality and correctness is greatly in their interest in preserving Vietnamese character their action.
6. Assuming your departure Washington temporarily postponed.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Flash. Drafted by Hilsman and Sullivan, cleared by the White House, and approved by Rusk.

At 10 a.m., President Kennedy met with his principal advisers: Rusk, McNamara, McCone, Robert Kennedy, Taylor, Harriman, Hilsman, McGeorge Bundy, Robert Manning, Colby, Krulak, Forrestal, and Kline. Many had been awake most of the night following the coup developments as the reports came into Washington. During the meeting, which is described as "Off the Record," the President attended Holy Trinity Church's All Saints Mass from 10:55 to 11:29 a.m. Kennedy then returned to the meeting which had continued without him. The President and his advisers met until 12:15 p.m. (Kennedy Library, President's Appointment Book) No other substantive record of this meeting has been found. Both Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, p. 301, and Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, p. 519, recall being awakened early on the morning of November 1 to follow the coup situation. Taylor states that Kennedy received the news of Diem's death at this meeting when, in fact, he received the news at the 9:35-10:05 a.m. meeting on November 2; see [Document 274](#).

Telegram 673 was apparently drafted before the 10 a.m. meeting.

² This telegram, sent from Lodge to Rusk via CIA channels, November 1, received at 7:55 a.m. reads as follows:

"Re Critic Flash CIA no 7, following message is being passed to General 'Big Minh':

"1. Generals will be received at Embassy after coup is over. (FYI: I expect to receive them myself.)

"2. We believe it would be better for Generals to meet with Tri Quang outside Embassy. We will advise him it is safe to leave when Generals inform us that in their opinion it is safe.

"Presume Department will require further information re composition and intentions new government but will be prepared act promptly on recognition as soon as this information available." (Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET)

³ CAS Saigon Critic 4, DTG 101955Z, November 1, received at the Department of State at 5:08 a.m., reads in part as follows:

“Conein reports from JGS that Gens are interested in whether or not Thich Tri Quang will be released from asylum at Embassy in order to join government as Buddhist advisor to symbolize freedom of religion.”
(*Ibid.*)

⁴ Document 260.

265. Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and Senator J. William Fulbright¹

Washington, November 1, 1963—12:01 p.m.

TELEPHONE CALL TO SEN FULBRIGHT

F returned the call and Sec said it looks as though coup will succeed. They have in mind turning over in 2-3 days to an all-civilian govt. So Sec hopes our people there will hold fire until this evolves. Looks as though VP will be Pres. This is not civilian vs. military. Sec said we had heard rumors re the coup but did not have details. Our own involvement is minimal. F asked if Sec wanted to come up before Comm. Sec said he could this p.m. or tomorrow a.m. Will be glad to. maybe early next week when he has more info. F said he was not advocating it. Sec said to say he or others will be glad to come.²

¹ Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 190, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Phyllis D. Bernau. Rusk left the meeting at the White House at 11:05 a.m. and returned to the Department of State. (Johnson Library, Rusk Appointment Book) Senator Fulbright was Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

² See [Document 300](#).

266. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, November 1, 1963—12:04 p.m.

674. If coup succeeds, acceptance and understanding of its purpose here will be greatly increased if Generals and their civilian associates continue to develop strongly and publicly the conclusion reported in one of their broadcasts that Nhu was dickering with Communists to betray anti-Communist cause. High value of this argument should be emphasized to them at earliest opportunity.²

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Flash; Eyes Only. Drafted by Hilsman and McGeorge Bundy and approved by Rusk. Apparently drafted before the 10 a.m. meeting at the White House; see [footnote 1](#), [Document 264](#).

² In telegram 871 from Saigon, November 1, received at 1:52 p.m. Lodge informed the Department that this “point has been made to Generals.” (Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET)

267. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Saigon, November 1, 1963—6:25 p.m.

MAC J00 8512. Personal for General Taylor and Admiral Felt from General Harkins. Subject: Coup.

1. Instead of getting four hours or two days notice, we got approximately four minutes. I returned from the airfield when in company with General Don and others we said goodbye to Admiral Felt, had lunch, and then back to the office. General Stilwell came into the office about 1345 hrs and said he had just received a telephone call in the clear from General Don saying that the General had decided to move and to notify General Harkins and his American friends. General Stilwell asked when they were going to move. General Don said immediately."
2. At this time firing was reported in the vicinity of the Spec Fcs HQ near Tan Son Nhut. Apparently ARVN troops were closing in on the HQ in an effort to take Col Tung prisoner.
3. Is now 1700 and during the afternoon there has been sporadic firing at a couple of planes who did some very poor bombing if they were aiming at the Palace. In fact, they hit our Embassy Marine House but apparently nobody was hurt.
4. I just talked to the Ambassador. He said that Big Minh and Don were trying to get in touch with the President and ask him to resign and Don and Minh promised the President and Mr. Nhu safe conduct out of the country if they would resign.
5. It is difficult to say at this time what the line-up of coup and counter coup forces is. The CNO, Captain Quyen, was reported killed this morning. The paratroopers took over the Navy HQ, put them on a ship and sent them down the river. The ARVN has taken over the communications and somebody else took over the civilian Police headquarters. The head of the Air Force, the head of the Paratroopers, the head of the Marine Brigade, the head of the Civil Guard, head of the Police force, and Colonel Tung were all prisoners in the Tan Son Nhut area. Unconfirmed.
6. At this time it is reported that the Palace is surrounded with the troops in position to attack if attack is necessary.

7. Until this thing settles down I am requesting that visitors be discouraged from coming to Vietnam. We don't know as of yet who the military have picked for leaders on the civilian side. Brig Gen Stilwell's house which is next to the old Palace received a few bullet holes as the troops went by on their way to Gia Long Palace. Betty² reports considerable shooting in the vicinity of my home though none of the shooting has been directed at the house as yet. There is an antiaircraft gun on the roof of the house across the street which has been quite active.
8. Don told Adm Felt and me that he was going to move two ABN battalions to Tay Ninh this morning. However, the move was to Saigon rather than the two places he indicated.
9. As of now it looks like we have two ABN, two Marine and two ARVN battalions in town with another parachute and ARVN bn enroute from the training camp in Vung Tau.
10. I have directed all US mil personnel to stay off the streets and not to take sides. I have also directed that the main thing now is to watch uprisings by the VC. I am sure they will take advantage of this to create a series of acts of terrorism within and without the city. All the police throughout the city have been disarmed, yet the streets seem crowded with people. Other than that, everything is quiet. All I can say is, there is never a dull moment here in Saigon. Warm regards.
11. P.S. All is now quiet. Some heavy stuff. Sounds like tank fire has just started. Oh me!!

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Exclusive; Eyes Only. Repeated to CINCPAC. The source text is the copy sent by the JCS to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. The telegram was also sent to the White House exclusive for Bundy. Received at the Department of State at 2:35 p.m.

² Mrs. Harkins.

268. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, November 1, 1963—6:53 p.m.

678. Re Critic 15.² Initial names for provisional government appear good as well as civilian-military proportion. Trust remainder of slate will be as sound.

Obvious that key to world attitude and most importantly US public and congressional reaction toward coup will depend primarily on Generals' statements and actions to implement statements. Realize you acutely aware problem this respect we face here and through wise counsel you doing what possible to assure Generals take right steps. We realize this Vietnamese affair and Generals appear to know where and how they wish to proceed and may not seek advice or take it if requested. Nevertheless for guidance following are points we hope Generals will bear in mind.

1. Practical evidence of determination prosecute war with renewed vigor.
2. Reprisals at minimum.
3. Safe passage for family to exile.
4. Humane treatment for arrestees.
5. Minimum censorship both method and length of time.
6. Minimum period martial law.
7. Prompt announcement re assumption RVN international obligations and readiness maintain relations with states friendly to RVN.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Drafted by Koren; cleared by McGeorge and William Bundy and Harriman; and approved by Hilsman and Rusk.

² This telegram, November 2—2:50 a.m. Saigon time, reads as follows:

“Reliable source at IGS reports that following personnel selected for provisional government which is to hold power for three to five months.

"Prime Minister Nguyen Ngoc Tho

"Vice Prime Ministers Pham Huy Quat and Tran Van Ly

"Min of National Defense and Commander of Gen Staff Maj Gen Tran Van Don

"Min of Interior, Brig Gen Ton That Dinh

"Min of Information, Brig Gen Tran Tu Oai

"Min of Youth and National Education Maj Gen Tran Van Minh

"Foreign Min Vu Van Mau

"Min of Public Works Tran Le Quang

"Ambassador to US Tran Van Chuong

"Min of Finance, Economy, Agriculture, Justice and Health are still to be chosen but all will be civilians.

"Vice Pres Tho has contacted Gens and is alive and safe. There will be no President in provisional govt since the Gens view Presidency as elective office whereas Prime Ministership appointive office. After 3 to 5 months free elections will be held for the election of a President. Gen Big Minh has several times emphasized he desires no post whatsoever.

"Same source reports Gen Dinh now at Palace talking to Commander of Ranger Battalion who has joined Presidential Guard.

"Provisional govt will state its primary objective as the successful prosecution of the war against the VC." (*Ibid.*, POL 15-1 S VIET)

269. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, November 1, 1963—8:47 p.m.

683. Eyes only to Ambassador Lodge. On assumption CAS 18² 2 and MACV 4 and 5³ are carried out, we send our warm thanks for a day of brilliantly quick reporting.

At 9:15 Washington time tomorrow morning, President will review position and urgently asks your recommendations for this meeting. Our preliminary thinking is that if current trends are continued we should move promptly toward support and recognition, but this move will require careful justification in light of danger of misleading comparisons in Latin America. Our thought is to emphasize failings of Diem regime in repression, loss of popular support, inability to continue effective prosecution of war, and even signs of desire to negotiate with enemy. By contrast, we expect to emphasize prompt and evident popular support for what is in effect movement by entire senior staff of Vietnamese armed forces, as well as many well-known and respected civilian leaders, end of repression, and aim toward prompt restoration of constitutional government. In this last we believe position of Tho very important and hope it can be emphasized there.

More immediately, we expect to background press this evening that this is not a coup in the sense that it is merely the product of a few scheming officers, but that day's events plainly show that Diem has yielded to virtually unanimous determination of military and civilian leadership of his country. In the context of civil war, this amounts to a national decision. This last point is of particular importance in underlining absurdity of notion that this national decision could have been merely a foreigner's trick.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET Secret; Flash. The text of this message was received from the White House for

transmission as a Department of State telegram. Cleared by McGeorge and William Bundy and Rusk and approved by Hilsman.

² This telegram, November 2—6:42 a.m., Saigon time, received at the Department of State on November 1 at 6:05 p.m., reads in part as follows:

“As of 0620 hours, 2 Nov, President Diem personally called General Don at JGS and offered to surrender with honor. Diem stated that he and Nhu wished only safe escort to the airport and departure from there, destination not specified. The Nhu children are not at the Palace. Gen Minh has accepted this and is attempting to arrange a cease fire at the Palace where heavy fighting now in progress.” (*Ibid.*, POL 26 S VIET)

³ MACV Critic 4, November 2—6:41 a.m., Saigon time, received at the Department of State on November 1 at 6:03 p.m., reported that Diem had agreed to surrender to the coup leaders. MACV Critic 5, November 2—6:53 a.m., Saigon time, received at the Department of State at 6:07 p.m., indicated that Diem and Nhu had been taken into custody at 6:40 a.m., Saigon time. (*Ibid.*, and *ibid.*, POL 15-1 S VIET, respectively)

270. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 2, 1963, noon.

875. Your Deptel 683.²

1. Agree we should move promptly to support and recognize. We should decide to resume commercial import payments but on a periodic and selective basis without public announcement so as to avoid appearance of blank check or of pay-off. We should not be first to recognize but should assure other friendly Embassies that this is our attitude that we will recognize as soon as a few others have done so. We should, of course, give unmistakable signs of our satisfaction to the new leadership.
2. Believe the very great popularity of this coup should be stressed. Every Vietnamese has a grin on his face today. Am told that the jubilation in the streets exceeds that which comes every new year. The Vietnamese employees at the Embassy Residence, whom I know well, have an entirely different look on their face today. When I drove to the office with a very small US flag flying, there were bursts of applause from the sidewalk, people shaking hands and waving. The tanks which were standing at the street corners were being covered with garlands of flowers and the Army was evidently immensely popular with the people. At the big circle in which [stands] the statue of the Trung sisters which was modeled in the image of Madame Nhu, young men were busy with acetylene torches cutting the statues off at the feet and putting cables around the necks so as to topple them to the ground.
3. Do not think the President should be identified with the story of the desire of the Diem regime to negotiate with the Army. I know of no hard evidence of such a desire.
4. Otherwise line proposed in reftel seems satisfactory.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret; Flash. Received at 11:38 p.m. and passed to the White House at 11:42 a.m.

[2](#) Document 269.

271. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, November 2, 1963—2:50 a.m.

688. For Lodge. News of Diem, Nhu suicides² shocking here and presumably in rest of world. Generals must preserve to extent possible good reputation their actions have thus far created. Therefore important to establish publicly beyond question that deaths actually suicide if this true and it not by violence. Believe best way to do so would be verification by unquestionably impartial group such as members UN team or members diplomatic corps with accompanying doctor's report.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIEI Secret; Flash. Drafted by Koren and cleared with Harriman and Forrestal.

² The news of Diem's and Nhu's supposed suicides was reported to Washington in CAS Saigon Critic telegram 22, DTG 020410Z, November 2, received at the Department of State at 12:24 a.m., November 2, as follows:

"Best estimate this time is that Diem and Nhu dead. Radio announcement reports they committed suicide by poison. CAS officers report have been informed by Viet counterparts that suicide committed en route from city to JGS but unable to find out how or when. Bodies reported to be JGS in armored personnel carrier or inside building. Feel with reasonable certainty that they are dead and continuing to check by what means and where now located." (*Ibid.*, POL 26 S VIET)

272. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff¹

Saigon, November 2, 1963, 6 a.m.

MAC J-3, DTG 012200Z. Reference: A. Your 011418Z Nov,² B. My 011515Z Nov.³

Summary Evaluation Situation.

A. Indicators of Coup Success.

1. All corps and division commanders have declared full support of their troops for the General Committee.
2. Coup forces control all major communication media Saigon.
3. No fighting or unrest reported anywhere in SVN outside Saigon area.
4. Population in Saigon-Cholon making no attempt to interfere with coup forces.
5. Fighting now localized to Presidential Guard barracks and area surrounding Gia Long Palace.
6. Growing list of civil figures reported on radio as having declared for General Committee.
7. No reports of any ARVN units moving to reinforce Palace or block coup forces.

B. Status of Public Order

1. Civil populace standing clear of fray, remaining indoors, scrupulously obeying curfew. No reports of looting.
2. Few uniformed police in evidence. Many have removed their uniforms and left posts.
3. All public utilities have functioned uninterrupted since coup began.

C. Units and Personalities Supporting Coup Group.

1. As indicated above, all corps and div cmdrs have declared for General Committee. This not conclusive evidence that all corps and division units are behind coup.
- 2.

Following are reported (by radio, JGS statements and/or advisor msgs) to have thrown support to General Committee:

VNAF (under Col Hien);
VNN (under Cmdr Cang, formerly head of river forces);
Special Forces Command (under Lt Col Trieu);
Senior officers (less Gen La) of CMD;
Airborne Brigade (under Colonel Vien);
Marine Brigade (under Lt Col Khang);

However one must remember that coup forces control radio and that there is no immediate way of confirming these claims.

3. Membership of General Committee as promulgated by Radio Saigon:
MG Duong Van Minh, Chairman
MG Tran Van Don
MG Nguyen Ngoc Le
MG Tran Van Minh
BG Le Van Nghiem (former CG, I Corps)
BG Nguyen Giac Ngo (former Dir, Guerilla Warfare)
BG Mai Hou Xuan (CG, Quang Tng Gr)
BG Tran Thien Khiem (C/S JGS)
BG Nguyen Van La (CG, Cmd)
BG Phan So Chieu (Don's deputy during martial law)
BG Le Van Kim (Office, Natl Defense)
BG Ton That Ding (CG III Corps)
BG Trang Ngoc Tam (Inspector, Strat Ham)
BG Tran Thieu Oai (Dir, Psy War)
Col Do Mau (Chief, Mil Security Service and now political advisor to Committee)
Col Nguyen Khuong (C/S, Army Cmd)
L/Col Nguyen Van Thien (Chief, Armor Cmd)
L/Col Le Nguyen Khang (CO, Marine Bde)
Col Duong Ngoc Lam (Director, CG/SDC)
L/Col Pham Van Thuyen (UNK)
L/Col Do Ngoc Nham (Chief of Material)
Maj Nguyen Ngoc Thiet (Provost Marshal)
4. Radio has also announced that following have declared support for Committee:
Col Nguyen Huu Hien (CO, VNAF)
Col Cao Van Vien (CO, Airborne)
Tran Van To (Police Commissioner)

L/Col Le Quang Trieu (reported new Special Forces Cmdr) Maj Tu
(Chief Binh Duong Province and CO 8th Regt)
Secy Nguyen Dinh Thuan (Natl Defense)
Minister Nguyen Luong (Finance)
Minister Hoang Tat Thanh (Natl Economy) Minister Tran Le Quang
(Agriculture)
(Thuan, Luong, Thanh last reported in Italian Embassy next to MACV
HQ)

D. The threat to U.S. nationals is limited to the spill over from fighting between coup forces and the Presidential Brigade in Saigon. To a specific request, coup forces assented to free movement of U.S. military personnel and guaranteed the security of U.S. installations. There have been no restrictions except those realistically imposed by sporadic fighting in Saigon and those prudently arising from the U.S. declared Condition Yellow. We have not had a single report of molestation of, or aloofness toward U.S. personnel. RVNAF officers at JGS Opns Center continue to pass all info freely to US counterparts.

E. VC Reaction to Coup.

Negative at this juncture. This is primary view and advisory personnel being pressed for indicators.

F.

It is too early to assess the effect of Saigon's own SVN forces and their operations against the VC. Obviously, forces engaged in the coup in Saigon will not be available for field operations until the course of the coup is run. However, the number of troops directly involved is not large; aside from the general reserve battalions, only gap created is in 5th Div tactical area. Further, the pro-coup declarations of all corps commanders augur against spread of civil war outside the national capital and therefore should preclude diversion of I, II and IV Corps from counter-insurgency tasks. This is, of course, highly speculative for there is no info available on reaction of paramilitary forces (Civil Guard, SDC, hamlet militia, or significantly, Republican Youth). However, The fragmentation of paramilitary forces, by geography and organization (company and lower) and the reality of the VC threat in areas of deployment preclude coordinated or massive counter action. We face the greater danger if the issue is long delayed and the country left without clear political and military leadership, for the VC will certainly move to exploit the resultant vacuum.

G. Steps Being Taken To Form New Government.

1. Big Minh, unquestionably in charge, has indicated that Nguyen Ngoc Tho is choice for President of provisional government. Whereabouts of Tho unknown to coup leaders.
2. Understood here that number of ministers (including those named in para C4 above) have tendered resignations to General Committee; their future is in doubt.
3. To be expected is a governing military junta at outset, should coup succeed. To be hoped for is a turnover to responsible civilian leadership as rapidly as practicable.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Priority. The source text is the copy sent for information priority to the Department of State and received at 5:05 a.m. Also repeated for information priority to CINCPAC and the White House.

² In this telegram, JCS 3342 to Harkins, November 1—11:20 a.m., the Joint Chiefs asked for information as follows:

"JCS need your running evaluation of events taking place in Saigon. Of special interest to us are following:

"A. Indications of coup success.

"B. Status of public order.

"C. Units and personalities supporting coup.

"D. Any threat to US nationals.

"E. Any VC or DRV reaction to coup.

"F. Effect of Saigon events on SVN forces and their operations against VC.

"G. Steps being taken to form new government." (*Ibid.*)

³ In this telegram, November 1—11:15 p.m., Harkins provided the JCS with a special report on events in Saigon through about 11 p.m., November 1. He also reported that he had directed U.S. forces to observe the curfew as declared by the Generals and that there were no reported U.S. casualties from the fighting. (*Ibid.*)

273. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 2, 1963, 8 p.m.

888. 1. Very reliable source gives following story about death of Diem and Nhu:²

They left the Palace on Friday evening³ accompanied by Chinese businessman who was the organizer of the Republican Youth in the Chinese town of Cholon. This man had engaged in this work not because he believed in it but in the interests of avoiding trouble for the Chinese community.

This Chinese took Diem and Nhu to a clubhouse which he owned where they arrived at about nine o'clock. Diem and Nhu, through this Chinese businessman, made a strong effort to have ChiNat Embassy give them asylum, did not succeed.

After spending the night in the clubhouse they, at eight o'clock in the morning went to church and about 10 minutes after that were picked up by the Army and were forced to enter an Army vehicle into which they were locked. This source does not know what happened after that-whether they are alive or murdered or suicides.

2. Luong, Finance Minister in Diem government, together with Thuan and former Economic Minister Thanh, spent Saturday afternoon at Generals' headquarters. General Big Minh told him that Diem and Nhu had been found in a church in Cholon at about 8 a.m. this morning and were locked up inside an Army vehicle. Due to an inadvertence there was a gun inside the vehicle. It was with this gun, said Big Minh, that they committed suicide.

3. Other versions received from CAS sources:

A.

According one CAS report, Col. Pham Ngoc Thao said at 1130 November 2, that he, with his forces, had entered Gia Long Palace in early morning hours for purpose of escorting Diem and Nhu to JGS Hqs

after their unconditional surrender. Following search, it was determined that Diem and Nhu were not at Gia Long and had not been there during course of coup. Thao returned to JGS with this information. There followed check of villas in Saigon/Cholon known to be used by Ngo family.

Detail, under personal direction of Gen Mai Huu Xuan, located Diem and Nhu at villa on Phung Hung St., Cholon. Xuan returned to JGS with bodies of Diem and Nhu. Nothing is known about actual cause of their demise.

B.

Another CAS report indicates that Lt. Nguyen Ngoc Linh, Special Assistant to General Nguyen Khanh, CG, II Corps, and at present in Saigon, said he had personally viewed at 1330 November 2, bodies of Diem and Nhu at JGS Hqs and there was no possibility of mistaken identities. Linh said it was clear that Diem and Nhu had been assassinated, if not by Xuan personally, at least at his direction.

While above apparently confirmed information, it should be remembered that current situation in Saigon is made to order for any speculation surrounding Diem and Nhu.

According to Thao and Linh, Diem and Nhu could have maintained telephone communications from Cholon villa throughout coup since lines run from Gia Long Palace to Thu Duc, and from Thu Duc to Cholon villa.

C. Still another CAS report indicates reliable source at JGS was told by Generals Big Minh and Little Minh and other officers that Diem and Nhu escaped from Gia Long Palace shortly after 0700 hours, November 2, by third tunnel which was unknown to Generals. Diem and Nhu left tunnel in dock area and then went to Don Thanh Chinese Catholic Church in Cholon, where they took poison. Diem and Nhu were found at church at 1030 furs. Usually reliable source was offered opportunity to see remains of Diem and Nhu, offer which he declined. CAS source has strong impression that Diem and Nhu are dead and bodies are at JGS.

D. Finally, another CAS officer was informed by officer of J-2, JGS, that President Diem, and his brother and one presidential orderly were caught and killed by personnel under direction of Gen Mai Huu Xuan

at church in Cho Quan, Cholon. Also captured with them was Capt Do Hai, nephew of Do Mau, Chief of Military Security Service.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Immediate. Received at 8:45 a.m. and passed to the White House at 9:28 a.m.

² See *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders* (Reps. 94-465, Senate 94th Cong. 1st sess.), p. 223, [footnote 1](#), for a summary of evidence and speculation on the deaths of Diem and Nhu. General Don, in *Our Endless War*, pp. 110-113, placed the responsibility for the Ngos' deaths on General "Big" Minh.

³ November 1.

274. Editorial Note

On November 2, 1963, the President held an off-the-record meeting at the White House with his principal advisers on Vietnam from 9:35 to 10:05 a.m. The participants at the conference with the President were Rusk, McNamara, McCone, Robert Kennedy, Taylor, Harriman, Hilsman, Henry L. T. Koren, Donald Wilson, and John S. Gleason. (Kennedy Library, President's Log Book) Taylor recounts that the meeting began with the fate of Diem and Nhu still unknown, but Michael Forrestal brought in a copy of a telegram stating that Diem and Nhu were dead and supposedly had committed suicide. Taylor was apparently referring to a White House copy of CAS Saigon Critic telegram 22, November 2, or telegram 888, [Document 273](#). Regarding Critic 22, see [footnote 2](#), [Document 271](#).

Taylor described the President's reaction as follows:

“Kennedy leaped to his feet and rushed from the room with a look of shock and dismay on his face which I had never seen before. He had always insisted that Diem must never suffer more than exile and had been led to believe or had persuaded himself that a change in government could be carried out without bloodshed.” (Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, page 301)

Arthur Schlesinger related that he saw the President “soon after he heard that Diem and Nhu were dead.” Schlesinger confirmed Taylor's impression that the President was “somber and shaken” and looking more depressed than he had been since the Bay of Pigs invasion. According to Schlesinger, Kennedy doubted that the Ngo brothers, as practicing Catholics, would have committed suicide and he felt that, after 20 years of service to South Vietnam, Diem's life should not have ended as it did. (Schlesinger, *Thousand Days*, pages 997-998)

Later in the day, the President held another off-the-record meeting on Vietnam with most of the same people. The meeting lasted from 4:30 to 5:35 p.m. and no record has been found of the discussion. (Kennedy Library, President's Log Book)

275. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Saigon, November 2, 1963—10:42 a.m.

MAC J-3 8556. Taylor and Felt from Harkins.

1.

We are no longer a republic.

As you know, the Diem regime has fallen and the President and Counsellor are in the custody of the General Committee at an undisclosed location. We fix the time of the surrender of the Palace at 020600H. While the issue was fairly clear late last night, it took a heavy assault on the Palace, by a much superior force, to bring capitulation. Diem was stubborn to the end; in fact when Dinh, as tactical commander, got the President on the telephone at 0600H, Diem demanded the immediate surrender of the coup forces.

2. During the evening of 1 November, the coup forces systematically reduced the Presidential Guard barracks, took its defenders prisoner and moved troops into position ringing the Palace garrison (estimated at 1000 and 4 armored vehicles). While Palace was subjected to harassing fire from initiation of coup, it was made clear that an assault would begin at midnight if no surrender forthcoming. Heavy pounding actually started around 0400. At this juncture, we still lack estimates of casualties, except for those involved in defense of the Presidential Guard barracks, I believe casualties to be light. At least 5 tanks were hit and burned in the vicinity of the Palace. No U.S. casualties as yet reported.

3. My summary evaluation, DTG 012200Z,² reflected the remarkable cohesion of the RVNAF once the coup started. Let's hope it will continue. Dinh, his deputy, Col Co, and 5th Div Cmdr Col Thieu, were the key figures at the operational level since the initial troops to close Saigon and initiate action were units under their opn control. Thien personally commanded the largest single force against the Palace, supported by the 4th Marine Battalion and elms of the 11th

Regt. Promotions of both Co and Thieu to Brig General already announced.

4. The lineup of the provincial govt looks good, for a starter. Tho is the logical choice until a stronger man appears-I shall push the Generals hard to make good their stated intention to relinquish, as soon as possible, the ministerial posts they have assumed. The nonappearance of Big Minh in the Cabinet was, of course, expected.
5. The big job now, and the entire interest of my people and me, is to get the new team focused on the VC immediately. We buckle down to this at once.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Exclusive; Eyes Only. Repeated for information to Felt, CINCPAC, the White House exclusive for Bundy, CIA exclusive for McCone, and the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. The source text is the Department of State copy; it was received at 10:07 a.m.

² Document 272.

276. Telegram From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) to the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins)¹

Washington, November 2, 1963—12:25 p.m.

JCS 4279-63. 1. Out of the present turbulence in Saigon we all hopeful will emerge a strong government able to prosecute the war with improved effectiveness. I am sure that you are thinking of all the changes and improvements which we might desire for the military apparatus. I have in mind such things as the establishment of a clear channel of command and more effective relationships between field commanders and province chiefs. I would appreciate knowing what you have in mind in the way of military improvements to be sought from the new government.

2. Related to the above is my concern over the possible adverse effect of the change in administration on the province chiefs. My impression is that we are generally satisfied with these men, who are now performing a very important military role in the conduct of the war. Do you consider that there is any likelihood of a wholesale replacement of present incumbents based on their prior relationships with Diem government? It is clearly in our interest to prevent removal of effective and experienced chiefs.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Eyes Only. Also sent to Felt. Repeated for information to Generals LeMay, Wheeler, and Shoup and Admiral McDonald; to the Department of State for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman; to the White House for Bundy; to the JCS for Admiral Riley and Krulak; and to the Department of Defense for McNamara, Gilpatric, and William Bundy.

277. Circular Telegram From the Department of State to All Diplomatic Posts¹

Washington, November 2, 1963—5:49 p.m.

833. 1. We now expect to recognize new regime in Saigon early next week. All missions, especially in Western Hemisphere, should be prepared to give full explanation this decision and sharp distinction between its basis and USG opposition to military coups against democratic regimes elsewhere. Elements of difference are these:

- (1) Diem regime had become instrument of complete personal authority of one family.
- (2) Diem regime was deeply opposed not merely by mass of people but increasingly by its own senior officials, civilian and military
- (3) Regime was increasingly incapable of giving effective direction to national effort against Communist subversion and aggression.

2. By contrast, the following can already be said about the government of military men and leading civilians which is now in control:

- (1) This government rapidly reversing previous regime's repression and has evident and general popular support.
- (2) Its declared policy is to transfer political power, in the near future, to a popularly elected government responsive to the will of the entire people.
- (3) It is rallying the nation for renewed prosecution of its war against Communist aggression.
- (4) This government, with the death of President Diem, has in its leadership his constitutional successor, Vice President Tho. (FYI. Tho appears to be slated for Prime Minister's role, but exact status still uncertain.)

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 16 S VIET. Secret; Priority. Drafted by Hilsman, cleared with McGeorge Bundy, and approved by Rusk.

278. Telegram From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)¹

Washington, November 2, 1963—6:31 p.m.

CAP 63602. Deaths of Diem and Nhu, whatever their failings, has caused shock here and there is danger that standing and reputation of incoming government may be significantly damaged if conviction spreads of their assassination at direction of one or more senior members of incoming regime. Evidence available here is thin and conflicting, but simple assertion of suicide obviously will not end the matter. We believe that it is deeply in the interest of the regime to make prompt and full explanation, and if the deaths not by suicide, to emphasize with clear evidence all mitigating circumstances. They should not be left under illusion that political assassination is easily accepted here. Across the months of repression and increasing ineffectiveness, American people and government remember great services to freedom rendered by Diem over many years.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET Secret; Eyes Only. Sent via CIA channels. Repeated for information to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, and to the CIA eyes only for McCone. The source text is the Department of State copy.

IV. U.S. Relations With the Provisional Government of Vietnam,
November 2-22, 1963: U.S. Recognition of the Provisional
Government, The Fate of Remaining Ngo Family Members and Tri
Quang, U.S. Advice to the New Government, Rejection of a
Neutralized South Vietnam, The Special Honolulu Meeting

[279. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in
Vietnam](#)

Washington, November 2, 1963—6:56 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL CAMB-S VIET. Secreti
Priority. Drafted by Hannah, cleared by Hilsman, and approved by Rusk.
Also sent to Phnom Penh, Bangkok, and Vientiane.

[280. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in
Vietnam](#)

Washington, November 2, 1963—8:13 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, AID (US) S VIET Secret;
Immediate; Limit Distribution. Drafted by Stoneman, Janow, and Hilsman
and cleared by Forrestal and Rusk and in draft by Bell.

[281. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in
Vietnam](#)

Washington, November 2, 1963—8:14 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, AID (US) S VIEI Secret;
Immediate; Limit Distribution. Drafted by Stoneman, Janow, and Hilsman
and cleared by Forrestal, Rusk, and Bell (in draft).

282. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Saigon, November 2, 1963—6:36 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Secret; Priority. Repeated for information to CINCPAC and to the Deputy Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Thailand. Passed by the JCS to the Department of State and the CIA. Received at the JCS at 10:01 p.m.

283. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Director of the National Security Agency (Blake)

Saigon, November 3, 1963—10:43 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Flash. Received in the Department of State at 10:09 p.m., November 2. Passed to USIB agencies.

284. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, November 3, 1963, 7 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Immediate; Limit Distribution. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 8:06 a.m. and passed to the White House at 8:22 a.m. On another copy of this telegram, a note indicates that it was sent to the President at 10:30 a.m. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables)

285. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)

Saigon, November 3, 1963—12:29 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated for information to CINCPAC exclusive for Felt. Sent by Taylor to the White House for Bundy; the Department of State for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman; and to the CIA for McCone and Helms.

[286. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, November 3, 1963—2:56 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Limit Distribution. Drafted by Mendenhall and cleared by Rusk, Hilsman, and McGeorge Bundy. Repeated priority to CINCPAC for POLAD.

[287. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam \(Harkins\) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff](#)

Saigon, November 4, 1963—1:05 a.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Secret; Exclusive. Also sent to CINCPAC; the Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Thailand; and the Embassy in Saigon. Repeated for information by the JCS to the White House exclusive for Bundy; to the CIA exclusive for McCone; and to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. The source text is the White House copy.

[288. Memorandum for the Record of Discussion at the Daily White House Staff Meeting](#)

Washington, November 4, 1963, 8 a.m.

Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by W.Y. Smith.

289. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Department of State

Saigon, November 4, 1963—7:26 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2191 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Hilsman, and Hughes; to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; and to the CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. It was repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt. Received at the Department of State at 8:23 a.m.

290. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, November 4, 1963, 4 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 8:23 a.m. and passed to the White House at 9:50 a.m.

291. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, November 4, 1963, 8 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Priority. Received at 9:55 a.m. and passed to the White House at 10:15 a.m.

292. Telegram From the Consulate at Hue to the Department of State

Hue, November 4, 1963, 10 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 30-1 S VIET Secret; Immediate. Repeated to Saigon. Received at 12:48 p.m. and passed to the White House at 1:30 p.m.

293. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)

Saigon, November 4, 1963—6:17 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Eyes Only. Passed by the JCS to the White House exclusive for Bundy; to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Harriman, Hilsman, and Ball; and to the CIA exclusive for Helms. Repeated for information to CINCPAC for Felt and to the Embassy in Saigon. The source text is the Department of State copy.

294. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in France

Washington, November 4, 1963—7:08 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 16 S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Limit Distribution. Drafted by Koren; cleared by Johannes Imhof, McGeorge Bundy, and Harriman (in draft); and approved by Hilsman. Repeated to Saigon.

295. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Saigon, November 5, 1963—2:06 a.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Secret. Repeated for information to CINCPAC; the Deputy Commander, Military Assistance Command, Thailand; and the Embassy in Saigon. Received at the JCS at 7:40 p.m., November 4, and passed to the Department of State, CIA, and White House.

296. Editorial Note

297. Telegram From the Embassy in France to the Department of State

Paris, November 5, 1963, 8 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 16 S VIET. Secret; Limit Distribution. Received at 6:03 p.m.

298. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)

Saigon, November 5, 1963—5:17 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Eyes Only; Priority. Also sent for information to CINCPAC for Felt and to the Embassy in Saigon. Repeated to the White House exclusive for Bundy; to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Harriman, Hilsman, and Ball; and to CIA exclusive for McCone and Helms. The source text is the Department of State copy, which was received at 6:40 p.m.

299. Telegram From the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Felt) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Honolulu, November 5, 1963—7:45 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Secret; Priority; Exclusive. Repeated for information to Harkins and passed by JCS to the White House exclusive for Bundy; to the CIA exclusive for McCone; and to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman.

300. Editorial Note

301. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, November 6, 1963, 4 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Limit Distribution. Received at 4:41 a.m. and passed to the White House at 4:51 a.m.

302. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, November 6, 1963, 5 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET Top Secret. Received in two parts at 6:47 and 8:11 a.m. and passed to the White House at 7:40 and 8:35 a.m.

303. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, November 6, 1963, 6 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Confidential; Priority. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 7:06 a.m. and passed to the White House at 7:30 a.m.

304. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, November 6, 1963—7:50 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Top Secret; Priority. The text of this message was sent by McGeorge Bundy at the White House to the Department of State for transmission to Saigon.

305. Memorandum From Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)

Washington, November 7, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Bundy wrote the following response on the source text: "MVF/ I'm for this as background stuff right now and as a quote in [illegible—any?] speech-and to be worked into [illegible—any?] press conference. McGB." The typewritten words "Draft-November 7, 1963," were crossed out on the source text.

306. Memorandum From the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hilsman) to the Secretary of State

Washington, November 8, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam, JCS Comments on RFE-90. Secret; No Foreign Dissem. Initialed by Rusk. Attached was a copy of a letter from Rusk to McNamara, November 8, which reads as follows: "Confirming our telephone conversation about INR's research memorandum RFE-90 of October 22, 1963, it is not the policy of the State Department to issue military appraisals without seeking the views of the Defense Department. I have requested that any memorandum given interdepartmental circulation which includes military appraisals be coordinated with your Department."

307. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, November 8, 1963, 4 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret; Limit Distribution.

308. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, November 8, 1963, 5 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Limit Distribution. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 11:13 a.m., November 9, and passed to the White House at 11:25 a.m.

309. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, November 11, 1963, 6 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 2 S VIET. Secret. Received at 7:25 a.m. and passed to the White House at 7:42 a.m.

310. Telegram From Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff to the Deputy Director, Far Eastern Division, Directorate of Plans, Central Intelligence Agency (Colby), at Saigon

Washington, November 11, 1963—3:27 p.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Sent via CIA channels. On November 2, at McCone's suggestion, the President approved sending Colby to Saigon to assess the situation there. Colby, in *Honorable Men*, pp. 217-220, recalls his impressions and highlights of the mission, which began on November 3 and ended on November 19.

311. Memorandum From the Deputy Regional Planning Adviser of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (Mendenhall) to the Assistant

Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)

Washington, November 12, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Confidential. Attached to the source text was a handwritten note from Forrestal to McGeorge Bundy which reads as follows: "Mac: I think the President should do this in light of N.Y. Times campaign which must be causing worries in Saigon. Mike".

312. Memorandum for the Record of Discussion at the Daily White House Staff Meeting

Washington, November 13, 1963, 8 a.m.

Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by W. Y Smith.

313. Memorandum From Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)

Washington, November 13, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Confidential.

314. Memorandum for the Record of a Conversation Between the Assistant Director for Rural Affairs of the United States Operations Mission (Phillips) and Prime Minister Tho

Saigon, November 13, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret. Transmitted to the Department of State under cover of airgram A-327 from Saigon, November 18.

[315. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, November 13, 1963—6:17 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Confidential; Priority. Drafted by Mendenhall and cleared by Hilsman and Forrestal. Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD, London, Paris, Bangkok, Ottawa, New Delhi, Vientiane, and Phnom Penh. See Document 311 for the suggestion that this cable be sent.

[316. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, November 13, 1963—7:52 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Priority. Drafted by Mendenhall; cleared with Forrestal, Rice, and Manning; and approved by Rusk.

[317. Memorandum From Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs \(Bundy\)](#)

Washington, November 14, 1963.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret.

[318. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency](#)

Saigon, November 16, 1963—12:50 p.m.

Source: Declassified Documents, 1977, 94B. Secret; Priority; Eyes Only. The number of this cable was deleted when the document was declassified in 1976.

319. Memorandum for the Record of Conversation Between the Assistant Director for Rural Affairs of the United States Operations Mission (Phillips) and President Minh

Saigon, November 18, 1963, 11 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret.
Transmitted to the Department of State under cover of airgram A-350 from Saigon, December 2.

320. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency

Saigon, November 19, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret; Priority; Eyes Only. The source text is the copy sent by the CIA to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes; also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; and to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy.

321. Memorandum of Discussion at the Special Meeting on Vietnam

Honolulu, November 20, 1963.

Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 334, MAC/VM Files: FRC 69 A 702, 204-58 Policy and Precedent Files (1963). Secret. No drafting information appears on the source text. An attached copy of the press release describing the work of the conference is not printed. Felt sent this summary of the discussion at Honolulu to McNamara under cover of a memorandum of November 22. The agenda for the meeting is not printed. Items E and G. of the agenda, "CIA-MACV Relations" and "Review of Special Funding", did not have memoranda of discussion. On November 19, Rusk and McNamara agreed to address certain items on the agenda in subcommittees which met on the morning of November 20

and then reported to the principal participants in the afternoon. Another copy of this memorandum is *ibid.*, RG 84, Saigon Embassy Files: FRC 67 A 677, 350. Honolulu Conference. In a November 13 memorandum, Forrestal briefed McGeorge Bundy on this meeting. The memorandum reads in part as follows: "From what I can gather the Honolulu Meeting is shaping up into a replica of its predecessors, i.e., an eight-hour briefing conducted in the usual military manner. In the past this has meant about 100 people in the CINCPAC Conference Room, who are treated to a dazzling display of maps and charts, punctuated with some impressive intellectual fireworks from Bob McNamara." (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Honolulu Meeting, Briefing Book, 11/20/63 A)

322. Memorandum for the Record of Discussion at the Daily White House Staff Meeting

Washington, November 22, 1963, 8 a.m.

Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by W. Y. Smith.

279. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, November 2, 1963—6:56 p.m.

697. Announcement by new Vietnamese regime of intention improve relations with neighboring countries offers encouraging prospects. Following preliminary views are offered for comment addressees:

Cambodia

Possibility of improved SVN-RKG relations particularly attractive as it might lead to RKG cooperating in preventing Viet Cong infiltration and smuggling. It might also create more relaxed atmosphere conducive to resolution various specific differences such as those involving frontiers. Moreover, improved Cambodian relations with a new, more responsive Vietnamese regime, coupled with Cambodian awareness of US benign, special relationship with new regime, might gradually bolster Sihanouk's confidence in future of Free World in Southeast Asia and reduce his [*less than 1 line not declassified*] fear of his neighbors.

Initiative for re-establishment relations probably must come from RKG which took initiative in severance, but new Vietnamese regime could do much, particularly in first few days and weeks of its tenure to encourage Sihanouk this direction. It would be particularly desirable at this time to take special precautions to prevent any new border incidents or overflights. Department does not, however, believe it would be wise for U.S. at this time to take initiative to urge RKG to resume relations since this would probably be misinterpreted as evidence new regime will be a puppet of U.S. Embassy Phnom Penh should however take advantage of ordinary contact with Cambodians to provide as much helpful background on developments in Saigon as possible and to express hope that under new circumstances relations will improve

For Saigon: Request you consider what would be proper timing to send EmbOff to Phnom Penh with backup materials to assist Ambassador in demonstrating quality and bona fides new regime.

Thailand

There appears to be no reason to doubt that Thai Govt will be inclined at least initially to be friendly toward new Viet regime, particularly in view recent Thai concern trend of events in Diem regime. Thai Govt will no doubt welcome it as one which promises to maintain war effort against Viet Cong while strengthening political situation at home. It is to be hoped that RTG will move quickly toward recognition new Viet regime and that it will develop closer relations than it had with former government. Expression of greater Thai interest in Vietnamese war effort would not only be encouraging to GVN but might be instructive to Thai military regarding problems which they may face at some time in future. Embassy Bangkok should accordingly in its discretion point out to Thai importance of forthcoming attitude on their part and provide information needed by Thai as preliminary to recognition.

There seems to be no reason to believe that Thai would oppose a closer relationship between GVN and RKG provided of course that Viet regime maintains its basic pro-Free World alignment. At same time it might be pointed out to Thai that new fluid situation created by change in Viet-Nam provides many opportunities for strengthening Free World in SEA. For example, it would be especially timely now for resumption Thai-Cambodian relations since if Sihanouk were almost simultaneously presented with real possibility of closer, more friendly relationships with his two principal neighbors, Cambodia's whole orientation might be slowly but fundamentally influenced. Therefore, while recognizing that Thailand has shown great patience with Sihanouk's outbursts, it might be useful that Thailand would be willing to ignore these outbursts at this time and re-double efforts to bring to a successful conclusion its negotiations with Cambodia.

Laos

Relations between the Diem regime and RLG were shadowy at best because of Diem's bitter reaction to RLG acceptance of Ambassador from DRV. There are diplomatic missions in both Vientiane and Saigon headed up by second-line officers, usually referred to as Charges. Presumably these representatives will not be withdrawn pending basic decisions in both countries. However, RLG may delay considerably before making any final decision regarding its future relations with new Saigon regime. Phoumi will probably find little difficulty in accommodating himself to Viet regime based on power of Generals whom he knows and with whom he might be able to cooperate in anti-Viet Cong operations. Souvanna will presumably be more cautious, preferring to study future course and stability of new Viet regime. It is in our interest that present

state of relations not be severed and that cooperation between RLG and GVN be encouraged, leading perhaps eventually to exchange ambassadors.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL CAMB-S VIET. Secreti Priority. Drafted by Hannah, cleared by Hilsman, and approved by Rusk. Also sent to Phnom Penh, Bangkok, and Vientiane.

280. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, November 2, 1963—8:13 p.m.

700. For Ambassador Lodge. Request you discuss following instructions with Brent, AID and report your joint views before implementing.

You are authorized to inform GVN, at your discretion, but not earlier than Monday Washington time that US prepared to resume CIP and PL 480² in order prevent disruption of war effort and economy and avoid hardships on population.

You are authorized to negotiate extension of the existing PL 480, Title I Sales Agreement to provide an additional three months supply of cotton, wheat flour and milk. Separate cable³ today provides more detailed negotiating instructions, including amounts as calculated here.

USAID/Vietnam is hereby authorized to issue procurement authorizations for the remaining approximately \$5 million of the existing \$18.5 million CIP allotment. A separate cable today transmits program approval and allotment information for \$20 million additional for CIP.⁴

We will proceed with pending project actions, i.e. Saigon water and power projects.

The CIP funds should be used within the framework of the FY 64 CIP program as earlier planned, and applied to those commodities which are already or which promise to be in short supply. Particular attention should be given to potential shortages that might have political repercussions on the new Government or on relationships between the U.S. and the new Government. At the same time we must, as you point out, avoid the appearance of giving the new Government a blank check.

Pursuant your suggestion, we plan no public announcement of resumption of CIP projects and PL 480. However, after hearing from you, in response inevitable questions in wake of recognition new Government, we plan say all types economic aid now going forward.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, AID (US) S VIET Secret; Immediate; Limit Distribution. Drafted by Stoneman, Janow, and Hilsman and cleared by Forrestal and Rusk and in draft by Bell.

² Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act; 68 Stat. 454.

³ Not found.

⁴ Not found.

281. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, November 2, 1963—8:14 p.m.

701. For Ambassador Lodge. When time and opportunity permits, but on high priority basis suggest you review Deptel 345 of 6 September² and hold extensive discussion with Brent and Silver of USOM Saigon on questions of improvements of joint US-GVN economic policies and necessary arrangements concerning 1964 economic and budget problems.

As you know, even with CIP resumption, serious 1964 GVN budgetary problem still remains on which we had planned urge GVN use its foreign exchange resources, accept increased deficits, raise taxes, cut certain expenditures and take many other measures towards austerity and budget discipline. We do not see how this basic position can be altered since CIP amount probably cannot be raised both as US budgetary matter and because of limited capacity of Vietnamese economy to absorb useful imported materials. Revelation this apparently tough position may cut across desired impression full resumption of support. We need your collective judgment re timing and manner getting into these issues bearing in mind it must be tackled fairly soon if GVN is to make necessary effort.

Related question is new regime personnel in this economic area. We have impression generals unfamiliar with it and should have great need personnel familiar with past history and complexity, and able to interpret the apparently tough USG positions as in fact reasonable and essential. Personnel such as Vu Van Thai and Dean Thuc could be most helpful along these lines. On other hand, we concerned at Embtel 884³ implication that Thanh might reappear in the new cabinet. We understand that in past he has been one of the obstacles in the Diem Government to putting VN economy and the AID program, particularly the CIP, on sounder counter-insurgency footing.

We are prepared to make high level experts available to assist the new Government in this task. We also understand that some work has been done recently by the National Economic Council which might be helpful.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, AID (US) S VIEI Secret; Immediate; Limit Distribution. Drafted by Stoneman, Janow, and Hilsman and cleared by Forrestal, Rusk, and Bell (in draft).

² In telegram 345, Hilsman and Janow informed Lodge and Brent of “fruitful interagency consultations” on the fiscal years 1964 and 1965 aid programs for Vietnam. The result of these deliberations was that planners foresaw that the Government of Vietnam was faced with an imminent financial dilemma made more difficult by Vietnam's military budget expenditures and willingness, ability to institute self-help measures, and the U.S. Congress' growing limitations on AID contributions to South Vietnam. (*Ibid.*)

³ Dated November 2, not printed. (*Ibid.*, POL 26 S VIET)

282. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff¹

Saigon, November 2, 1963—6:36 p.m.

MAC J-3 85 73. Summary Evaluation SVN.

Ref A JCS DTG 011418Z.²

Ref B My DTG 012200Z.³

A. Indicators of coup Success

1. The initial objective of the coup group has been attained. Open resistance to the coup forces has ceased, leaving the military in full control of the apparatus of government.
2. Deaths of the President and Counsellor, protective custody of Can would appear remove only significant symbol around which supporters of former regime might rally.
3. From all outward appearances, there is strong public support of the Armed Forces and the new govt those forces have established. The mood of the population is jubilant, by Vietnamese standards rapport between troops and people is excellent; everywhere, people are bringing food to troops.

B. Status of Public Order

1. During morning hours, there were numerous large, spontaneous and enthusiastic demonstrations. As of now (mid-afternoon), it is quieter, but the streets are crowded; this is, of course, Saturday and a holiday to boot (Memorial Day for VN war dead).
2. There has been some sacking and looting but, thus far, it has been highly selective. In addition to the Palace, the targets have been holdings of the Nhus (Times of Vietnam; book stores; commercial concerns; HQ of Women's Solidarity League); residences of Minister Hien (Civic Action), Luong (Interior) and Trinh (Education); and home of senior Republican Youth leader. In all actions, student groups have been in vanguard.
3. Few civil police in evidence, many having discarded uniforms and jobs yesterday; those on duty are making little or no effort to influence crowds. Military have reacted quickly to the incipient danger of crowds getting out of hand. Military Police and some line troops are

deployed at critical locations and handling situation in relaxed, effective manner. Notably, Minh, Don and Dinh have been personally moving to reported trouble spots to supervise. Reconstitution of police force is a first priority task of regime.

4. All public utilities continue in full operating condition.
5. Martial law in effect, country-wide.

C. Personalities in New Govt

1. Following changes to initially reported lineup:
 - a. M. General Duong Van Minh is Chief, Joint General Staff.
 - b. M. General Tran Van Don is Minister of National Defense.
 - c. M. General Mai Huu Xuan is Director, National Police.
 - d. Do Khac Mai, promoted to Colonel, and named Commander, VNAF.
2. Promotions:
 - a. Ton That Dinh, III Corps Cmdr and Minister of Interior designate, promoted to Major General. He is currently responsible for military security of Saigon-Cholon area-again.
 - b. To Brig General:
 - Do Mai, Chief MSS
 - Co, now CG, 7th Div
 - Thieu, now CG 5th Div
 - Phat, formerly CO 2nd Div
3. BG Nghiem, formerly I Corps Cmdr, has assumed command of VN Special Forces.

D. Threats to U.S. Nationals

1. No report of U.S. casualties as result of coup action.
2. Rapport between U.S. and VN military continues excellent. What is notable is new warmth of common man towards U.S. personnel.
3. Condition Yellow remains in effect, with intention to relax to Grey tomorrow.

E. VC Reaction to Coup

1. While it cannot be directly linked to exploration [exploitation?] of situation, unusual pattern of VC attacks reported in Vinh Long. After daylight this morning, VC, aggregating 200, attacked 6 Strat Hamlets. VC described as clad in blue uniforms.
2. 33rd Ranger Bn has flushed estimated 300 VC in Ho Bo area, Binh Duong Province.

3. No evidence any direct VC participation in minor disorders (para B2 above) in Saigon.

F. Effects of Saigon Events on SVN Forces and Their Operations Against VC

1. Understandably, as the result of nationwide military interest in coup developments combined with a national holiday, the tempo of offensive operations slowed drastically today.
2. It recognized here that it will take several days to re-focus the attention of the new government on priority military tasks. The attention of the entire higher command structure is now centered upon the most pressing of all immediate problems: the establishment of a viable government. There is also an impact upon field commanders, particularly sector commanders who face, in varying degrees, personal and political reorientation.

G. Steps Being Taken To Form New Govt

1. Nothing substantial to report.
2. Coup leaders are making determined efforts to maintain order and at the same time, transform popular exuberance into political support. For example, Generals Minh and Don were reported as being well received this morning as they shook hands with, and moved freely among, the people of Saigon.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Secret; Priority. Repeated for information to CINCPAC and to the Deputy Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Thailand. Passed by the JCS to the Department of State and the CIA. Received at the JCS at 10:01 p.m.

² See [footnote 2, Document 272](#).

³ Document 272.

283. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency
Station in Saigon to the Director of the National Security
Agency (Blake)¹

Saigon, November 3, 1963—10:43 a.m.

024. Critic. Young Vietnamese Saigon businessman who CAS casual source exhibited set of snapshots morning 3 Nov which showed [Ngo] Dinh Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu covered with blood, apparently bullet riddled, lying dead on floor of armored vehicle with hands tied behind them.

Source claims pictures given to him by actual photographer who member of coup forces. Source would not identify photographer. Snapshots examined by CAS Saigon Acting Chief of Station and other senior case officer. Both agree photos appear authentic.

Source states pictures taken approx 1000 hours 2 Nov near Gia Long. Source adds it his understanding Diem and Nhu escaped Gia Long through underground tunnel and were driven by Cao Xuan Vy to church in Cholon, where they were captured. Vy has since disappeared. Source adds bodies were offered to wife of former Asst Defense Minister Tran Trung Dung, who niece of Diem. Mrs. Dung, near hysteria, refused accept bodies.

Pictures now being offered for sale to international press in Saigon. CAS does not now have copies but will obtain 3 or 4 Nov.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Flash. Received in the Department of State at 10:09 p.m., November 2. Passed to USIB agencies.

284. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 3, 1963, 7 p.m.

900. CINCPAC for POLAD. General Don and General Kim called at 3 o'clock. (They explained that General "Big" Minh was tied up in conference with V.P. Tho.) After my congratulations on their masterful performance and my offer of assistance they asked me if I had any questions.

1. I asked whether they were planning a statement which would absolve themselves from the assassination of Diem and Nhu. They had not thought of making statement, but obviously agreed that they should make it clear that they had offered Diem safe passage out of the country if he would resign; that they deeply deplored the assassination; that the assassination had not only not been in any way ordered by them but was contrary to their wishes and was, unfortunately, the kind of thing which will happen in a coup d'etat when order cannot be guaranteed everywhere. I am sure assassination was not at their direction. For your information, I believe this is the most that you can expect of them and that when they make a statement like this it ought to be welcomed in Washington. Burial and funeral of Diem and Nhu would be family matter. Bodies would be in vault in cemetery here and would be taken to family vault in Hue later.
2. I asked whether they had any ideas in mind concerning the relations between the United States and the Government of Vietnam. Don said, with a big grin, "Certainly and we would like to start getting milk and flour for free sale immediately and, of course, the restoration of economic aid." (FYI, I hope that this can be done promptly.) Don said that for psychological reasons they planned to lift immediately restrictions on sale of milk in cafes, etc., which were recently instituted by Diem regime.
3. I then asked what kind of a government they planned to have—a military committee or successor government, or what. General Kim, who did most of the talking, said that three solutions had occurred to the group. The first was a straight out military junta, the second was a government with a military majority, and the third was a government in which the military had only a slight interest. And the

third was the kind of government on which they decided. In this there was a military committee which was presided over by General Minh. Under this there was a Prime Minister and under him there was a Cabinet of some fifteen ministers, of which four or five would be military. Mr. Tho would be Prime Minister. When I asked why it would not be more astute for Mr. Tho to have the title of President rather than the title of Prime Minister inasmuch as his powers were going to be the same in either event and that it would make it look like less of an abrupt transition, they said that the title of President had been reserved for General Minh as President of the Military Committee, who would be a ceremonial head. They said they would be willing to call Mr. Tho President of the Council in the French style rather than Prime Minister. I did not see much advantage in that. They said this would be a provisional government which would last six months and even longer but certainly not two years. They would have a provisional constitution and the present constitution was suspended. They seemed to be completely decided that this was how they were going to do it.

4. I then asked them whether the Generals were going to stay united and win the war? This seemed to move them both. They said they had been divided a long time and knew from bitter experience what it costs to be divided. General "Big" Minh now is their leader. They would do everything possible to be united. The army needs a much more aggressive morale than it has. Even Nhu had said the Army did not have as much drive as it should have, and he was responsible for many of the troubles. They would bend over backwards to stay united. Don said that he was Vice President of the Committee and Khiem Second Vice President.
5. I asked about safe passage for the Nhu children and for the members of the family to exile. General Don said he would personally take it in charge. They planned to take the Nhu children in Vietnam, who were three in number, and who had been in Dalat when the coup occurred, and give them over to Madame Dung, the niece of Madame Nhu. They were now in Phan Pang. I suggested that when everything was ready and the children were all set to go that this be announced to the press. This struck them as a good idea, although they evidently had not thought about it at all.
6. I asked them about the people who had been arrested and the previous ministers—whether they would receive humane treatment. They said that no previous ministers had been arrested. In fact, they didn't know that anybody of that rank had been arrested. I spoke about Mr. Thiep, who is well known in international parliamentary circles and who had been picked up last night, and whose wife was

frantic. General Kim made a note of the name and said he would look into it. They would all get humane treatment.

7. I then asked about Tri Quang. They said of course he would be safe. As their group was completely committed to religious freedom, they would like to not have him just slip out of the Embassy quietly without some kind of ceremony for him. At the end of the meeting I took them down to the 2nd floor to see Tri Quang and after a long consultation it was decided that Tri Quang would walk quietly out of the building tomorrow and if they want to have a ceremony for him, they can have it somewhere else, not in front of the Embassy. Kim said they had in mind making Tri Quang a member of a council of wise men, which would advise Big Minh.
8. I asked about reprisals and purges and expressed the hope that there would be no wholesale purges but that reprehensible individuals would be dealt with as special cases. They said that, except for incompetents, they wanted everybody below the rank of minister to stay on and in fact they would like to have the Diem Cabinet, most of the Diem Cabinet, come back to their posts in order to assure continuity.
9. I asked about the lifting of curfew and restoration of dancing. They said dancing could be restored at once but they would keep curfew on for another two days. They said the United Nations Commission, together with Buu Hoi, was leaving today.
10. I said I much wanted an exit visa for Mrs. Gregory so that she could leave the country [*1 line not declassified*]. They said they would gladly provide it.
11. On the matter of censorship, General Kim said that at a press conference yesterday he said he wouldn't be a demagogue and say there would be no censorship but there would be as little as possible and that he wanted to facilitate any difficulties and hoped they would all telephone him if anything went wrong. So far he had had no telephone calls. He also asked me to call him personally if I heard of difficulties on this score.
12. They said of course they would assume all international obligations and I said that I was sure recognition would not be long in coming.
13. Don asked me my opinion [garble—of?] Thuan of whose whereabouts he said he was ignorant. I praised him highly: character, intelligence, understanding of other countries.
14. He said Amb. Chuong wanted to come home and be part of the government, but they didn't want Madame Chuong back in Vietnam.

They were extremely frank and forthcoming in all their answers and we did more business in fifteen minutes than we used to be able to do at

the Palace in four hours. They expressed warm thanks to me for not thwarting, for not giving up Tri Quang, for my general attitude; and it was clear throughout that the withholding of commercial imports had a tremendous psychological effect. They said their coup was organized without a single piece of paper having been kept. All papers were burned; everything was memorized.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET Secret; Immediate; Limit Distribution. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 8:06 a.m. and passed to the White House at 8:22 a.m. On another copy of this telegram, a note indicates that it was sent to the President at 10:30 a.m. (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, State Cables)

285. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Saigon, November 3, 1963—12:29 p.m.

MAC 2081. 1. Saigon is quiet and orderly and all evidence indicates revolutionary committee has situation well in hand. Some troops still positioned throughout city and police also in evidence. Martial law continues with curfew hours changed to 1900 to 0500.

2. With ref your JCS 4279² intend to press the new govt for same military improvements which we have been endorsing in the past, specifically:

- a. Direct chain of command.
- b. Subordination of prov chief to corps and div comdrs in military matters.
- c. Emphasis on the trng of units, including hamlet militia (and militia squad leaders).
- d. Opnl use of gen reserve.
- e. Opnl use of Special Forces under JGS and corps comdrs (now reported accomplished).
- f. Better use of military engineers.
- g. Better use of Navy and Civil Guard boat companies in Delta.
- h. Lifting of restrictions on aircraft armament.
- I. Increased tempo of opns with emphasis on those types of opns which augur success of desired objectives.
- J. Freeing of ARVN elements from static security missions and reduction isolated outposts.

3. All of the above have previously been discussed with military leaders who were responsive to the need for such improvements and I anticipate that they, functioning under the new govt structure, will be inclined to institute desired changes.

4. As concerns the effect of the change in administration on the province chiefs I do not have at this time details on country-wide reaction of these very important individuals. Am in the process of assembling info

on this point and will report in detail soonest. As a general response to your query and based on info presently available.

- a. As a general rule, with some exceptions, we have been satisfied with current line up in so far as their military duties are concerned.
 - b. Do not anticipate any wholesale shakeup of present incumbents.
 - c. Agree that it to our best interests to prevent removal of effective or experienced chiefs, and to experience the minimum of changes.
 - d. Several prov chiefs have to date declared their allegiance to the new govt. Consolidated list being assembled and will be forwarded ASAP.
 - e. Have reed info of temp replacement two (2) prov chiefs in I Corps.
5. Sr adv IV Corps advises that Gen Cao has been replaced as CG IV Corps by Col Nhon who continues to function as CO 21st Div.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated for information to CINCPAC exclusive for Felt. Sent by Taylor to the White House for Bundy; the Department of State for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman; and to the CIA for McCone and Helms.

² Document 276.

286. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, November 3, 1963—2:56 p.m.

704. Your 900² and 901.³

1. Several developments in aftermath coup creating serious concern here. Suggest you arrange see General Duong Van Minh for prompt discussion of following:
- 2.

Reports of manner death of Diem and Nhu (shot and stabbed with gory details) carried in press headlines and causing considerable shock here. When pictures bodies reach U.S., effect will be even worse.

Urgent that prompt and complete clarifying statement be made. Clarification described in your 900 should be expanded with full account of arrangements for safe passage and safe removal Diem and Nhu from palace. We do not think there should be any suggestion that this is just the sort of thing you have to expect in a coup. On the contrary, Generals should emphasize extensive efforts we understand they made to prevent this result.

3.

Mme. Nhu has issued long, bitter statement in effect holding U.S. responsible for coup, using such phrases as "cruel treachery", "treason" and "dirty crime." Statement and reaction to Diem/Nhu deaths accentuate importance of assuring safety Nhu children. We trust intentions expressed to you by Don re children and other members Ngo family will be carried out. Prompt and chivalrous treatment of children will be particularly helpful here in context of death of father.

Marguerite Higgins has contacted Hilsman on behalf Mme. Nhu asking that children be brought out to Rome. Suggest you arrange transportation for this purpose. Use military aircraft if necessary.

4.

Deeply disturbed by reports arrests of Tran Quoc Buu and Nguyen Phuong Thiep. We consider it of highest importance that new regime immediately release them and avoid further actions directed toward personalities who apparently not guilty any crimes.

Suggest you point out these developments at minimum give appearance military not in full control of situation and unless promptly corrected will produce strong adverse international reaction contrary to regime's desire attract international sympathy. Thiep well-known in U.S. Congressional circles and Buu highly regarded by American and international labor movement.

5. FYI. Re Deptel 700.⁴ American and world public opinion problem relating to paras 2, 3, and 4 above, are sufficiently serious as to indicate those points should be clarified before public announcement of full resumption of aid. It is not our intention to use delay in resuming aid as summary leverage on Generals, but you should emphasize importance of immediate action to ensure as favorable international image as possible. Public here would not understand resumption of aid before clarification these points. End FYI.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Limit Distribution. Drafted by Mendenhall and cleared by Rusk, Hilsman, and McGeorge Bundy. Repeated priority to CINCPAC for POLAD.

² Document 284.

³ Telegram 901, November 3, 7 p.m., reported the arrest of CVTC leader Tran Quoc Buu. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET)

⁴ Document 280.

287. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff¹

Saigon, November 4, 1963—1:05 a.m.

MAC J-3 8587. Summary Evaluation South Vietnam.

Ref A, JCS DTG 011418Z Nov.²

Ref B, my DTG 021036Z Nov.³

A. Indicators of Coup Success.

1. Very little to add to evaluation contained Ref B. There have been no counter-coup actions reported, anywhere in the nation, during the past 24 hours. The junta is definitely in control of the situation, at this juncture.
2. Mood of the Saigon population remains exuberant.
3. Information is scanty in the following areas:
 - a. Specific moves to eliminate secret apparatus of the Can Lao Party. The only arrests of which we are aware are, in addition to Colonel Le Quang Tung and brother Trieu (both rumored dead), a handful of Vietnamese Special Forces officers. General Cao has been relieved but not clear yet whether reason was political unreliability or military incompetence.
 - b. Extent to which wholehearted support and participation of influential civilian leaders and institutions has been gained.
4. The junta appears genuinely concerned over possibility of some pre-arranged counter-coup action; and thus considers next 48 hours or so to be crucial. Conceivably, counter-coup action could be stimulated by Republican Youth, elements of Special Forces not yet accounted for or other instrumentalities of Can Lao Party. We consider likelihood of large scale action to be remote; however terroristic acts are distinctly possible.

B. Status of Public Order.

1. The street and squares are alive with people, today. Old hands report that population notable for numbers in evidence, and for relaxed attitude.
2. No further indications of ransacking residences or offices closely associated with the Ngo family or regime. General Don appealed to the

population to be circumspect in this regard; considerable numbers of troops deployed throughout the city to enforce injunction, if necessary; their mere presence suffices. In this connection, people appear reassured by, rather than fearful of, presence of troops.

3. General Don reports that Saigon civil police force has been reconstituted at nearly pre-coup strength; that, given assurances, the great bulk of those who left their posts in fear on Friday have returned to duty. In this regard, Don expressed high confidence in General Xuan (Director General of National Police) who was an experienced police official prior to becoming an army officer.
4. Public utilities continue to function uninterruptedly.

C. Personalities in New Government.

1.

Following are changes or additions to previous reports:

- a. Major General Tran Van Don will be both Minister of National Defense and Chief, Joint General Staff. He plans to discharge both responsibilities from the same office at JGS Headquarters.
- b. Tran Thien Khiem (promoted to Major General) is to continue as Chief of Staff, for the time being.
- c. Le Van Nghiem (promoted to Major General) will command both Special Forces and Airborne brigade. Former Airborne commander, Colonel Vien, to be reassigned.
- d. Ton That Dinh scheduled to relinquish command of III Corps in next few days. Logical successor (and best choice) would be Brigadier General Co. However current information is that nod will go to Brigadier General Thieu, Commander, 5th Div and key figure in coup.
- e. Colonel Nhon (expected to be promoted 4 November) has assumed command IV Corps. Vice General Cao reported Nhon will be replaced at 21st Division by Colonel Han (former Chief of Staff, IV Corps).
- f. No further changes reported on division commanders.

Replacement of 23rd Div Commander (Colonel Le Quang Trung) likely.

2. Additional promotions:

- a. To Major General: Le Van Kim (Minister of Agriculture designate), General Tran Thieu Oai (Director of Psywar).

D Threats to U.S. Nationals.

1. Excellent state of public order and attitude of both Vietnamese officialdom and population led to decision to relax security condition to White at mid-morning.
2. JGS has sent instructions down through chain of command for division commanders to insure security of advisors at sector level. This may be reflection of new government's concern about some reaction by elements still loyal to former regime.
3. No reports, from any quarter, of hostility toward or action against any U.S. personnel.

E. VC Reaction to Coup.

1. The attacks in Vinh Long, reported in Ref B, were in fact, harassing fires. No friendly or enemy casualties.
2. MACV assessment is that there has been no significant change in pattern of VC incidents since initiation of coup.

F. Effect of Coup on RVNAF and Operations Against VC.

1. As expected, today was a duplicate of yesterday. No deployments from Saigon back to field. However, VNAF resumed tactical operations. Minds of senior military still concentrated on structuring and policies of government.
2. The hope is for early upsurge in tempo and effectiveness of the military counterinsurgency efforts. General Don passed assurance to COMUSMACV via J-3 that troops would be returned to field stations in a couple of days. He also said one of first acts would be to tidy up III Corps by shifting northern boundary southward (as originally recommended) and eliminating the capital military district as a territorial command.

G. Steps To Form New Government.

1. Reported that decree establishing provisional government will be promulgated tomorrow. Expected that powers of state will be temporarily vested in a committee (Don referred to a praesidium) with Duong Van Minh as chairman and from which the ministries would depend.
2. As a minimum, Ministries of Defense (Don), Home Affairs (formerly Interior) (Dinh), Education (Tran Van Minh), Agriculture (Kim),

Information (Oai) to be military incumbents, at outset. Promise is to relinquish all as soon as responsible civilian replacements can be found.

3. Thus far, only the province chiefs of the two northernmost provinces have been replaced. However, the odds are for more widespread change. The probable formula will be an arrangement which separates military (security) and civil responsibilities.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Secret; Exclusive. Also sent to CINCPAC; the Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Thailand; and the Embassy in Saigon. Repeated for information by the JCS to the White House exclusive for Bundy; to the CIA exclusive for McCone; and to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. The source text is the White House copy.

² See [Document 2](#), [Document 272](#).

³ Printed as [Document 282](#).

288. Memorandum for the Record of Discussion at the Daily White House Staff Meeting¹

Washington, November 4, 1963, 8 a.m.

1. Mr. Bundy presided throughout the meeting.

[Here follows discussion of matters unrelated to Vietnam.]

3. Vietnam. The coup in Vietnam was the subject of a somewhat rambling discussion which focused mainly on the problem of recognition but also touched on a number of other points.

Bundy made it clear that we would recognize the government in the next day or two. He asked that this word be gotten to the American Republics Section of the State Department because he knew that cables were already coming in from Latin American countries which pointed up how our recognition policy in Vietnam appeared to differ from that in Latin America. Cooper of CIA suggested this might be a good time to spell out US recognition policy. Bundy replied he was enough of a diplomatic historian to know that if a government did this it would certainly be in trouble, because the approach to recognition changed with circumstances.

Schlesinger said we must recognize that our recognition policy toward Latin America is different from our policy in other parts of the world because of our special responsibilities. He admitted that our recent emphasis on constitutionality of governments in Latin America could be jeopardized by our recognition of the Vietnamese coup and tried to draw a distinction between the Far East situation and the one in Latin America. Bundy commented that he was sympathetic with Schlesinger's approach, but what it seemed to amount to was, if we liked people, we would say what they did was constitutional and if we didn't we would not. After a bit more discussion, there seemed to be a consensus that the two criteria for recognition should be (1) an effective government, and (2) one that has the support of the people. This approach will avoid the strict legal approach to recognition and avoids centering our policy solely on constitutionality and legitimacy.

Bundy said that he had no intention of making publicly any clear-cut statements along the lines above, but he did think it might be a good idea for the President to have a press conference this week² to explain our attitude toward the Vietnamese coup and, in process, draw some distinctions between the various types of military revolts. He asked Gordon Chase to compile the President's previous statements on recognition.

One interesting sidelight is the importance of a coup having the support of the people. Bundy and others were impressed with the fact that the Saigonese people threw garlands of roses on the tanks and seemed genuinely pleased with the revolt. In contrasting this with certain Latin American military coupe, Bundy remarked that Latin American generals would do well to plan for some such demonstration of support. He made the remark half jokingly, but he was serious in noting that such things were important. Given my suspicious mind, I wondered if all the local support in Saigon was spontaneous or whether some of it had been arranged.

At one point, the discussion turned on what was the determining factor in bringing about the coup. The subject came up when, in talking of recognition, Bundy said that perhaps we should have a policy of showing our support for various governments not by mere recognition, but by willingness to provide them economic and military assistance. In discussing the effectiveness of such assistance, Bundy remarked that he thought cutting off the commodity support program in Vietnam was probably the determining factor in bringing about the revolt at this time. Forrestal agreed. Hansen of BOB, however, took a somewhat different view, saying that the verbal pressure we had put on also had some effect, and was probably the most important thing we did. There followed some discussion which came down to the fact that our cutting off assistance to the special forces and cutting the commodity support program were two actions that showed that we meant business with our words. The primary point Hansen was trying to make never became clear, but I think it probably stemmed from the fact that, as a budgeteer, he would not like to see the assistance programs manipulated in every crisis.

Bundy deplored the slaying of the brothers Nhu, and said the evidence was mounting that they were assassinated. Bundy remarked there are supposedly some pictures which will soon appear publicly, showing the brothers in a pool of blood with their hands tied behind their backs.

Bundy said this was not the preferred way to commit suicide, and regretted that the coup leaders still insisted that it was.

With respect to the government of Vietnam, Bundy and Forrestal agreed that perhaps a provisional government would be preferred over a period of months rather than settling in for a long time with a more constitutional government of less effective people. These remarks were related to the difficulty of getting good civilians in the cabinet.

[Here follows discussion of matters unrelated to Vietnam.]

¹ Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by W.Y. Smith.

² The President held a press conference on November 14; for the transcript, which includes questions and answers on the situation in Vietnam, see Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1963, pp. 845-853.

289. Telegram From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 4, 1963—7:26 p.m.

1. On 4 Nov CAS source close to General Tran Van Minh reported that Minh said that former Minister of Finance, Ha Van Vuong, and former Minister of Agriculture Le Van Dong, of two years ago, told Minh that the Generals are quarreling among themselves. They also say that if the Generals cannot come to an agreement within next day then the Marines who actually led the coup against the regime would lead a counter coup.

2.

According to Minh, these several items are contributing to the discord among the Generals:

None of the Generals is jubilant over the murder of Diem. General Nguyen Khanh's only stipulation for joining the coup was that the President would not be killed. Generals were in agreement that as little bloodshed as possible was to take place. General Duong Van Minh issued orders that only fire fights on given objectives were to take place and property was not to be destroyed. Little Minh says the Generals are very disturbed over the looting that has taken place. Another point of disagreement among Generals is the manner in which promotions were handled. Duong Van Minh passed approving of promotions to Tran Van Don. Tran Van Minh and Nguyen Ngoc Le thought some of the Generals' promotions should be held up for the moment. At this point, Tran Van Don passed approval promotions to Tran Thien Khiem, who announced the promotions including his own. Former Vice President Tho who was party to promotion discussion was very disturbed over manner promotions.

3. Last meeting of Generals discontinued at 0300 hrs 4 Nov and to be continued sometime after 1300 4 Nov. Generals have not been able to come to agreement on Cabinet. The major deterrent in coming to agreement centers around General Ton That Dinh. Dinh who figured among the primary coup movers and, according to Little Minh, carries some weight with Duong Van Minh, wants to be Minister of Interior. Former Vice President Tho objected strongly to Dinh taking this

position. Also, several Generals are concerned over Dinh's second demand that newly appointed General Do Mau be made Minister of Youth Affairs. Duong Van Minh suggested compromise by moving some of Interior's functions into Ministry Administrative Affairs to Prime Minister [sic] and in essence Tho would hold the portfolio of Ministry of Interior and Dinh would handle the security affairs for Interior.

4. According to Minh, Cabinet positions have been discussed as follows:

Prime Minister and Minister Interior, Nguyen Ngoc Tho.

Ministry of National Defense, General Tran Van Don.

Foreign Affairs, Vu Van Mau, if he will accept and if not, then Pham Dang Lam, presently Chief Secretariat Foreign Ministry.

Secretary State for Presidency, Nguyen Thanh Cung.

Finance, Luu Van Tinh.

Rural Affairs, Tran Le Quang (who would take over some of the functions of Interior thereby diluting still further some of Dinh's responsibilities).

Public Works, Tran Ngoc Oanh.

Economy, Huynh Van Lang (this position is controversial and may be changed).

Youth Affairs, Do Mau (at insistence of Dinh and strongly objected to by Nguyen Ngoc Le and Tran Van Minh).

Health, vacant at moment (turned down by Pham Huy Quat).

Justice, vacant (no agreement reached primarily because of Dinh's objections).

Information, Tran Tu Oai, turned the job down and objected when Tran Van Kim was proposed because two brothers-in-law would then be in Cabinet.

5. At the close of the meeting, it appeared that only four of the Generals had to be ministers. They were Defense/Don, Interior/Dinh,

Information/Kim, and Youth/Maul

6. Tran Van Minh and Nguyen Ngoc Le told Duong Van Minh they willing to help in putting together Cabinet but they must be sensible about it. They received only shrug of shoulders from Duong Van Minh. At this point, Vice President Tho pulled Tran Van Minh aside and said don't be discouraged that he, Tho, would try to help and that he thought Tran Van Minh's counsel very valuable.
7. Afternoon of 4 Nov General Big Minh told reliable American source that Dr. Tran Kim Tuyen had been arrested because it had been discovered that he was plotting a counter coup.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate. The source text is CIA Station telegram 2191 from Saigon sent to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Hilsman, and Hughes; to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy; and to the CIA eyes only for McCone, Carter, and Helms. It was repeated to Honolulu eyes only for Felt. Received at the Department of State at 8:23 a.m.

290. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 4, 1963, 4 p.m.

913. CINCPAC for POLAD.

1. I had it from an unimpeachable source that the bodies of Diem and Nhu were returned to the families and that they are now in the morgue at St. Paul's Hospital. The source which has seen the bodies said both were shot in the nape of the neck and that Diem's body in particular showed signs of having been beaten up. This definitely disproves the rumor of suicide.
2. According to [*less than 1 line not declassified*] of the Chinese Catholic Church in Cholon, both men were kneeling in church and were taken out and shot, then put into the armored car.
3. According to General Don, they called Diem shortly after 4:30 p.m. (FYI—After Diem's call to me),² and all of the Generals in the room took the telephone in turn and offered him safe conduct if he would resign; Don believes that he was dissuaded from resigning by brother Nhu. *Comment:* Once again brother Nhu proves to be the evil genius in Diem's life.
4. General Don confirms the story that Diem and Nhu left the Palace on Friday evening in a vehicle with two aides and drove to Cholon and went into a house which they had long since prepared and from where they could be reached by telephone from the Palace and could make outgoing telephone calls themselves. General Don and his associates wanted very much to get them out of the country safe and sound, and no one deplored their assassinations more than he does. They provided an armored car so that they would not be lynched.
5. Thuan told me last night that there was an Indian astrologer who was here a few weeks ago who predicted a "frightful massacre" of a "great family". The respect with which he and former Economics Minister and Finance Minister considered this prediction confirmed the reports I have always heard of the prestige which astrologers have in this part of the world.
6. Thuan said that after my talk with him in Dalat last Monday,³ in which I outlined the type of things which U.S. wanted the GVN to do, he put them up to Diem saying that they were really not much to

ask. He believes that Nhu talked Diem out of agreeing to do anything that would please U.S.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 8:23 a.m. and passed to the White House at 9:50 a.m.

² See [Document 259](#).

³ See [Document 220](#).

291. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 4, 1963, 8 p.m.

917. Report of conversation with General Minh and General Don. Lt. Colonel Conein was with me.

1. I began by saying we had made preliminary arrangements for resumption of milk and flour deliveries and asked who should be Brent's contact in the Vietnamese Government for discussion of this and other aid matters.
2. They said that the new government was going to be announced later in the day and that Brent could deal with the appropriate minister.
3. I stressed repeatedly the importance of publishing a very complete and detailed account of their efforts to arrange safe passage for Diem and Nhu; their repeated telephone calls and urgings to Diem to resign; and the provision of an armored car so that Diem and Nhu would not be lynched on the way out of the Palace. Like many people in this part of the world, they do not appreciate the importance of public relations, but I think maybe I made a dent.
- 4.

I then stressed the importance of getting the Nhu children out soonest and was told that they were now in Saigon and that the Generals, too, wanted to get them out soonest.²

5. On the question of Ngo Dinh Can, they said that their General in Hue had just telephoned that there was a very large and hostile crowd around the house where Can lives with his mother and that he was obviously thoroughly loathed for all his many cruelties in the past and that the crowd wanted his skin. I asked whether or not Can wanted to leave his mother and the country, and they did not know. This is an exceedingly puzzling question. It would obviously be very bad if Can were lynched. It would also be bad if we tore him away from his mother.³
6. Both Minh and Don have made extensive inquiries regarding the whereabouts of Tran Quoc Buu, the labor leader. Each member of the Generals' council specifically interrogated, and they are absolutely definite that none of them had taken any steps to have him arrested.

They say that he is not in any police station; that he was not arrested but has been kidnapped and is now in some private house. They are continuing the search. (FYI—Believe it is important for Department to point out to George Meany⁴ and others that new government says that this man was not “arrested” but has been kidnapped.)

7. They said that Dr. Tuyen had resumed to Saigon from Hong Kong via Bangkok and had at once started pulling his old plotting organization together. They suspect him of having engineered the kidnapping of Buu in order to make trouble for the new government and put it in wrong with the world labor movement.
8. I repeatedly stressed the importance of the Generals keeping united and going out and winning the war and not getting a reputation for arbitrary arrests, which would damage their ability to win the war as it had damaged that of the Diem regime.
9. Minh seemed tired and somewhat frazzled, obviously a good well-intentioned man. Will he be strong enough to get on top of things?
10. Deptel 704⁵ seems to show some divergence between ourselves and yourselves on significance and merit of the coup. Here is how it looks to us:
 - a. To whomever has ever been involved in either a military or a political campaign, this coup appears to have been a remarkably able performance in both respects. To mention but one out of [many] features, the way in which secrecy was preserved and no papers of any kind were used during and preceding operations might be profitably studied by any organization in which leaks and a superfluity of paper are problems. The concentration of effort on switchboards, radio stations and communications facilities showed a realism not possessed, for example, by those who attempted the coup against Hitler.
 - b. Experts who have all along been hostile to the coup and who said “win with Diem” now say that this coup means that the war can be drastically shortened. One observer, watching the performance of the ARVN, said if these men can perform like this when their hearts are in it, why isn't it reasonable to believe that they can do equally well against the Viet Cong?
 - c. I quite agree that Generals should make clear that they were opposed to any harm coming to Diem and Nhu and that the rest of the Ngo family will be humanely treated. I recognize that these Generals will make mistakes, and I hope they don't start arbitrary arrests and fighting among themselves. Also I am doing everything I can for Buu and Thiep. But this is only way these people can get a change—which they are very happy about.

- d. And we should not overlook what this coup can mean in the way of shortening the war and enabling Americans to come home. Hope we can get solidly behind the new crowd and give them a real chance.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Priority. Received at 9:55 a.m. and passed to the White House at 10:15 a.m.

² The three youngest children of Ngo Dinh Nhu and Madame Nhu were in Dalat during the coup. The eldest daughter was in the United States with her mother. They were taken to Phan Rang on the coast and then to Saigon. With the cooperation of the Military Committee and the American Embassy, the Nhu children left Saigon at 4:20 on November 4 for Bangkok accompanied by an Embassy official and a nurse. (Telegram 713 to Bangkok, November 4, *ibid.*, POL 15-1 S VIET)

See Marguerite Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare*, p. 225, for her recollection of her role in arranging for the evacuation. A memorandum of a telephone conversation among Madame Nhu, her eldest daughter Le Thuy, and Roger Hilsman, November 4, concerning the arrangements for the evacuation of the children is in Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Memorandum of Conversations. Secretary Rusk and other U.S. Government officials followed the November 4 evacuation of the Nhu children from Vietnam very closely, reflecting the President's desire that they be reunited with their mother as soon as possible. (Department of State, Rusk Files, Telephone Conversations)

³ In telegram 714, November 4—4:58 p.m., the Department agreed that Can should not be harmed and that “we should make every effort to get him and his mother, if necessary, out of country soonest, using our own facilities if this would expedite their departure.” (*Ibid.*, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET)

⁴ President of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations.

⁵ Document 286.

292. Telegram From the Consulate at Hue to the Department of State¹

Hue, November 4, 1963, 10 p.m.

15. Ngo Dinh Can reportedly still at Redemptionist Seminary although was possibly scheduled for removal to Saigon today by General Do Cao Tri. One of Can's emissaries today reported Can appeared desperate this morning and was ready seek asylum at Consulate as soon as emissary gave go ahead.² Emissary replied when Can sought asylum was Can's choice. Another of Can's emissaries reported Can would like his mother and one servant to come with him. Mother, incidentally, rumored to possibly have died today, or at least to be failing quickly. As far as it is known, she remains in her own residence.

During 4 November thousands of people visited area of Can residence which still guarded by troops and armor and nearby Tunam Pagoda. Many thousands also trekked three kilometers to large estate of Can south of Hue which about half constructed. Estate, which included large agricultural development and various buildings and landscapings, thoroughly looted and destroyed by crowds. Former French ammo storage buildings which converted to eighteenth century type dungeons with filthy, tiny pitch black cells also on grounds. Latter observed by reporting officer. These source of considerable agitation against Can and family.

University and high school classes held without incident, although one report received that students at Quochoc High School attempted to turn on known former secret police agents at school but disarmed by faculty.

Province Chief told enthusiastic crowd of 2,000 civil servants today that all caches of arms and agents of former regime should be reported, he would form peoples committee to help him solve problems, people should allow criminals of former regime to be punished by courts, demonstrations by people would be allowed in a few days. Latter presumably would be pro-coup.

Helble

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 30-1 S VIET Secret; Immediate. Repeated to Saigon. Received at 12:48 p.m. and passed to the White House at 1:30 p.m.

² On the afternoon of November 2, two separate emissaries of Ngo Dinh Can contacted U.S. officials at the Consulate at Hue to ask for assistance if Can's life were to be placed in danger. U.S. officials replied that Can could only be helped if he was in "imminent danger from mob violence" and pointed out that the Consulate's premises were not inviolable. If asked by Government of Vietnam authorities to turn him over, the Consul would have to comply. (Telegram 12 from Hue, November 2; *ibid.*)

In telegram 5 to Hue, November 2, the Department instructed the Consul to grant Can asylum at his request if he was in physical danger from any source. The Consul was to explain to local authorities that further violence against the Ngo family would harm the new regime's international reputation. The Consul should also remind these authorities that the United States took similar action to protect Quang Tri from the Diem government. (*Ibid.*)

In telegram 6 to Hue, November 3, the Department sent further instructions that in the event assistance to Can endangered American lives, Helble should contact General Tri and request protection and removal of Can. The Department also suggested that the Embassy in Saigon consider Can's immediate evacuation. (*Ibid.*)

293. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Saigon, November 4, 1963—6:17 p.m.

MAC JO1 8605. Personal for Gen Taylor info Adm Felt from Harkins.

1. Situation in Saigon remains quiet and orderly. Curfew hours have been relaxed-now from 2400 to 0500.
2. No indication of any counter-coup activity, however, understand Revolutionary Committee fully appreciates possibility such may develop and are alert to this contingency.
3. A word received today that BGen Co (formerly Col Co Deputy CG III Corps) now CG IV Corps. No info as to future utilization of Gen Cao former IV Corps comdr. BGen Thieu (former CO 5th Div) now CG III Corps designate.
4. At brief meeting this am of Big Minh and M Gen Timmes Minh expressed regret that it had been necessary to resort to a coup, however, it had been apparent that rectification of the situation by pacific means would not be possible. Stated that daylight coup had been decided upon in belief that fewer casualties would result. Nov 1st selected due that day a holiday and children would not be in school which would also tend to minimize casualties. He stated that Revolutionary Committee had not anticipated overthrow of the govt would be particularly difficult but that major concern was how VC might react. Feels that coup was carried out with such dispatch that VC did not have time to react and that now situation permits troop availability to counter any VC reaction which may now develop.
5. Best line-up on province chiefs as of now follows:
 - a. Fourteen (14) old prov chiefs have pledged their support to the coup and retain their prov chief assignments.
 - b. Three (3) old province chiefs have been reported as retaining their assignments, however, not indicated that they have pledged their support to the coup.
 - c. Two (2) prov chiefs in I Corps have been replaced.
 - d. Six (6) prov chiefs in II Corps have been relieved and their security responsibilities have been assumed by ARVN comdrs in their areas.
 - e. No info at this time on remaining sixteen (16) prov chiefs.

6. Numerous promotions, some of which have been previously reported, have been made. Consolidated details later as available.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Eyes Only. Passed by the JCS to the White House exclusive for Bundy; to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Harriman, Hilsman, and Ball; and to the CIA exclusive for Helms. Repeated for information to CINCPAC for Felt and to the Embassy in Saigon. The source text is the Department of State copy.

294. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in France¹

Washington, November 4, 1963—7:08 p.m.

2333. For the Ambassador. Re Embtel 2164.² Circular 833³ sent you for info re recognition new regime Vietnam. Our intent still is to recognize as soon as possible after interim government formed and provided generals do not in meantime take any actions which would be inimical to our interests or their international posture. Suggest you inform De Gaulle accordingly and inquire as to GOF intent but not press for parallel action by France.

Deptel 697 to Saigon⁴ also being passed to you for background. Suggest you draw on 697 and on following guidance at your discretion in light of your own assessment of De Gaulle's view of problem. Suggest you tell De Gaulle we think new regime in SVN offers good opportunity for improvement GVN relations with Cambodia and Laos. Improvement with Cambodia would be particularly helpful and in best interest these two countries as well as area in general. If French agree, it would be helpful if they could use their influence in Phnom Penh toward this objective. Suggest you also indicate to De Gaulle our feeling that change in regime ends any thought in Saigon of accommodation with NVN on basis of neutralization which idea previous regime may have toyed with.

Death of Diem and Nhu regrettable no matter in what manner it occurred. According to information from Embassy Saigon death not intended or ordered by coup leaders. Coup carried out in remarkably restrained and efficient manner indicating wisdom and sense of responsibility on part of generals and also that coup overwhelmingly supported by populace. We feel that generals committed to vigorous prosecution of war and will re-energize struggle not only in military but in civilian aspects. In sum we feel basis has been laid for an effort in Vietnam that gives far greater hope for success than was case under Diem government. We intend to support this effort to the extent possible and feasible. In this connection we plan resume very near future flow of our aid which was temporarily in suspense.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 16 S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Limit Distribution. Drafted by Koren; cleared by Johannes Imhof, McGeorge Bundy, and Harriman (in draft); and approved by Hilsman. Repeated to Saigon.

² Telegram 2164, November 4, requested information on plans to recognize the new government in Vietnam and guidance on what to say to President De Gaulle when Bohlen met with him on November 5. (*Ibid.*)

³ Document 277.

⁴ Document 279.

295. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff¹

Saigon, November 5, 1963—2:06 a.m.

MAC J-3 8607. Summary Evaluation South Vietnam.

Refs: A. JCS DTG 011418Z Nov.² B. My DTG 031705Z Nov.³ C My DTG 041817Z Nov.⁴

A. through E.—No substantial change to ref B and C.

F. Effect of coup on RVNAF and their operations against VC.

1. There has been no significant change in Saigon troop dispositions since coup. VNAF support missions and small unit actions continue at nearly normal pace while bn and larger operations remain in a slump as the senior ARVN commanders remain preoccupied with political reorganization, and ARVN continues police chores. Expect by weekend CMD units should replace majority of III Corps units in Saigon.
2. Surge of cooperativeness toward US personnel continues, although too early to judge extent of its staying power. AOC and JOC personnel report improved responsiveness in counterparts. I Corps sr advisor today reports increased spontaneity of information from ARVN.
3. Decision to maintain VN special forces, to delimit functions, to subordinate command to JGS and to place deployed elms under full command of Corps Cmdrs. This will be boon to unity of effort and decentralization of control. Details to be reported separately.
4. CG 2 ADIV reported today that VNAF restrictions on aircraft armaments lifted.
5. New leaders can be expected to support strat hamlet operations as pillar of strategy; and Big Minh repeats his awareness of their socioeconomic importance.
6. Top commanders stress desire to get on with war at full throttle as soon as govt formed and launched. No plans for increased tempo for opns yet forthcoming.

G. Steps Being Taken To Form New Government.

1. Nothing definitive since last report. Committee still in throes of organization; negotiations with top civilian leadership are reportedly advancing slowly.
2. From this point forward, Embassy will probably have fuller info on organizational steps and progress.
3. Reshuffling of personnel at provinces and district level continues.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Secret. Repeated for information to CINCPAC; the Deputy Commander, Military Assistance Command, Thailand; and the Embassy in Saigon. Received at the JCS at 7:40 p.m., November 4, and passed to the Department of State, CIA, and White House.

² See [footnote 2, Document 272](#).

³ Printed as [Document 287](#).

⁴ Not found.

296. Editorial Note

On November 5, 1963, the composition of the new Vietnamese Government was announced. The Embassy in Saigon reported the announcement in telegram 927, November 5, which was received at the Department of State at 2:59 a.m. and passed to the White House at 3:20 a.m. The new appointments included the following:

President: General Duong Van Minh;
Premier, Minister of Economy and Minister of Finance: Nguyen Ngoc Tho
Minister of Defense: General Tran Van Don;
Minister of Security: General Ton That Dinh;
Minister of Foreign Affairs: Pham Dang Lam;
Minister of Justice: Nguyen Van Mau;
Minister of Information: General Tran Tu Oai;
Secretary of State for the Premier's Office: Nguyen Than Cung;
Secretary of State for Finance: Luu Van Tinh;
Secretary of State for Economy: An Trnong Thanh.

Telegram 927 was repeated to CINCPAC, Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Vientiane, Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Canberra, Taipei, Paris, London, Bonn, Rome, Manila, Seoul, The Hague, New Delhi, Djakarta, and the Commander, U.S. Army, Pacific. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET)

297. Telegram From the Embassy in France to the Department of State¹

Paris, November 5, 1963, 8 p.m.

2223. Ref: Deptel 2333.² I told De Gaulle that it was our general intention to recognize the Vietnamese Government when it was formed and provided they did not take action which would be inimical in the near future. De Gaulle said that of course France had never supported the Diem regime because they had not shown the proper attitude towards French interests there and while regretting the assassination of Diem and his brother they did not have any great regrets for the regime. The U.S. on the other hand had continually supported Diem until the very end when he had lost our confidence. De Gaulle then gave his view of the future of the present regime along typically De Gaulle lines. He said the military were in power, the military meant war, this would mean that they would intensify their war efforts and would press us for increased assistance, demands which we would find hard to resist. He saw very little hope in the Indo-Chinese situation and attempted obliquely to place some blame on the U.S. for coming into the south while China and Russia were coming in from the north. I pointed out to the General however that we would have been perfectly willing to live with a divided Vietnam but that the Communists were the ones who had started the current war and that it was either a question of helping Vietnam resist these attacks or letting the entire country go Communist. I asked the General whether he thought a divided Vietnam was worse than a divided Korea. He replied that the division of Korea meant that there was no solution there, to which I agreed but said that there was at least an accommodation that kept the peace. He repeated his prophecy that the present government would have to be more active in the war and that this would eventually make it unpopular with the people as had been the case with Diem.

Comment: I did not feel it wise to raise with De Gaulle our feeling that the change in regime would end any question of neutralization. I did not think this added anything to the discussion and he certainly gave me no evidence of any interest in the question.

Bohlen

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 16 S VIET. Secret; Limit Distribution. Received at 6:03 p.m.

² Document 294.

298. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Saigon, November 5, 1963—5:17 p.m.

MAC JOO 8625. Gen Don called on me this morning. This is the first time I've seen him since Adm Felt's departure last Friday.² We discussed the recent past and future plans. I said I had heard so many conflicting stories on the coup and on the demise of Diem and Nhu I would like to get his version.

He said as far as he could tell, Diem and Nhu left the Palace Friday evening about 2200. They went in some Chinese civilian's car to a house in Cholon. Though the Generals had talked to Diem and Nhu during the evening, neither of the brothers let on they were no longer in the Palace. JGS intelligence knew the house in Cholon and the two were arrested there, Saturday, a.m.

They were placed in an M-133 for security and for delivery to the JGS compound. Upon arrival at the compound it was discovered they were dead. The Generals were truly grievous over this because they had promised safe conduct. Don did not explain what had happened, whether it was suicide or someone had not got the word.

He is holding the coffins for later shipment to Hue for burial.

I asked about Ngo Dinh Can, the late President's brother in Hue. Don said I Corps troops were protecting him and he was considering bringing him to Saigon for safekeeping. I asked about the graves reported being found in Can's enclave. Don smiled and said they had nothing to do with Can at all. Don knows Can very well and, while I Corps Commander, visited him many times. He said he knew where the graves were and that they had been there for years. They belong to many families who lived in and around the area even before it became Can's residence.

Don went on to say he received a call from Los Angeles from Mrs. Nhu this morning. That the Madame went into a tirade, saying they were all fools-murderers and bought by the Americans-that the people would

never follow Big Minh or the military. Don disclaimed any connection with the demise of Diem and Nhu—also that he was not bought off. He told the Madame if she were here she would see for herself the changed attitude of the people. She asked about her children. Don told her they departed last night, but could not tell her when they would arrive in Rome. Incidentally, they must be there by now as they made good connections with a jet flight out of Bangkok last night.

As to the present—they were still making changes in command—also in some province chiefs (I'll report them when firm). I reminded him many of the province chiefs had done well and suggested not changing them all just for change's sake.

He admitted he and Big Minh considered the possibility of a counter coup—but are not too concerned as they pretty well know who is involved.

I asked about Col Tung, former Commander of the Spec Forces. Don said Tung was with the Generals when the coup started. He said he didn't know what has happened to him since.

Don feels he can get most of the troops out of the city by this weekend and as soon as the changes in command are established, he will be ready to prosecute the war. He said he as Minister of Defense and Chairman of the JGS could see no difficulties in getting orders carried out.

The Special Forces now under command of Maj Gen Nghiem, former Commander of III and I Corps and who now also commands the parachute brigade, will be directly under the command of the JGS. Further, when working in a corps of S.F.'s would be under command of the corps commander concerned.

He intends to disarm the Republican Youth except those who are hamlet militia, and also Madame Nhu's Women's Army. He hopes to steer them to more productive fields—didn't explain the productive part.

Don said Gen Dinh, presently III Corps Commander, would probably be Minister of Security. Wearing this hat he would command the National Police and perhaps the Gendarmerie. However, he was considering bringing the Gendarmerie back into the army as most of the officers and NCO's originally came from the army.

All in all, if, I repeat, if things work out, we'll have a more orderly set-up-and a more streamlined chain of command, fewer para-military organizations under arms and not as much concern with political interference which caused delays and in some cases changed missions and orders.

I reminded Don that the courage and determination shown by the coup's battalions in overcoming the Presidential Brigade of 1,500 men, if displayed in fighting a VC battalion of three to four hundred men, could make short order of the remaining VC in SVN.

All this might add up to a much earlier ETA for getting counterinsurgency in SVN under control.

I feel sure this will be true if I can get the show on the road.

Regards.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Eyes Only; Priority. Also sent for information to CINCPAC for Felt and to the Embassy in Saigon. Repeated to the White House exclusive for Bundy; to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Harriman, Hilsman, and Ball; and to CIA exclusive for McCone and Helms. The source text is the Department of State copy, which was received at 6:40 p.m.

² November 1.

299. Telegram From the Commander in Chief, Pacific
(Felt) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff¹

Honolulu, November 5, 1963—7:45 p.m.

DTG 060545Z. Military Improvements in New Government-RVN.

A. JCS 4279-63 of 2 Nov.²

B. COMUSMACV 2081 DTG 030429Z.³

C. COMUSMACV MAC J-3 8607 DTG 041806Z.⁴

D. COMUSMACV MAC J-3 8587 DTG 031705Z.⁵

1. Ref A requests comments on military improvements to be sought from new government of RVN. Ref B is COMUSMACV response with which I agree. Following are additional comments:

- A. In conversation with Gen Don last Friday morning, he emphasized his contention to get control of the Special Forces. I note ref C reports decision has been made to maintain the Special Forces but to delimit their functions and to subordinate command to the JGS and corps commanders.
- B. During same conversation with Gen Don, proficiency of Gen Cao was discussed and I got definite impression that a change would be made in order to give better leadership to the accelerated military effort to be undertaken in IV Corps. Ref D reports that Gen Cao has been relieved by B Gen Nhon.
- C. It important, of course, for combat units brought into Saigon during coup to be returned to their field duties at [of] fighting the war. My staff estimates that there is an equivalent of one and one-half divisions in Saigon area not counting troops from Quang Trung training center and Thu Duc. Ref C reports no significant change in Saigon troop disposition since the coup and that situation should start to improve by the coming weekend.
- D. VNAF had been operating under restrictions as to armament load. Ref C reports restrictions have been lifted.
- E. We hope to see soon increased tempo of operations in the field and implementation of intent as stated orally by the gens.
- F. It particularly important to obtain whole-hearted support of civilian leaders and institutions.

- G. Under Diem regime, restrictions were placed against military psyops directed toward population in support of civic action program. We can expect these restrictions to be lifted.
- H. It encouraging to note that police in Saigon are back on the job.
- I. Ref D gives preliminary report on province chiefs. I would expect new arrangement to destroy parallel system established by Diem whereby province chiefs could switch hats and bypass the corps commanders and the JGS.
- J. I think it important to determine the future of Nhu's Republican Youth Organization.
- K. We can assume that Nhu had an organization which was penetrating the military. Counter-coup planning would emanate from these infiltrators. They should be weeded out.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Defense Cables. Secret; Priority; Exclusive. Repeated for information to Harkins and passed by JCS to the White House exclusive for Bundy; to the CIA exclusive for McCone; and to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman.

² Document 276.

³ Document 285.

⁴ Document 295.

⁵ Document 287.

300. Editorial Note

On November 5, 1963, Secretary of State Rusk, accompanied by Assistant Secretary Roger Hilsman, testified in secret executive session before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the situation in Vietnam. Secretary Rusk in his testimony set the background of the situation in Saigon in the weeks preceding the coup, minimized U.S. involvement with coup planners, and expressed the Department of State's fear that the coup would result in a prolonged civil war. Rusk reviewed Lodge's efforts to assure Diem's safety during the coup, and described Nhu's and Diem's escape to Cholon, their surrender and capture, and their deaths. Rusk opined that the Generals did not order the assassination, which "was done by trigger-happy people down the line." Rusk explained that the Nhu children had been evacuated to Rome and that Madame Nhu was traveling to meet them there.

Rusk was optimistic about the prospects for the new government in South Vietnam which he thought would be predominantly civilian. Rusk concluded his testimony by reviewing abortive coups and "endemic" rumors of coups since 1960. These, Rusk stated, had made him skeptical about rumors of the November 1 coup. Rusk then answered extensive questions from members of the Committee. The 39-page transcript of the hearing is in the National Archives and Records Administration, RG 46, Records of the Committee on Foreign Relations, Declassified Executive Sessions Hearings.

301. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 6, 1963, 4 p.m.

947. Deptels 719² and 735,³ Embtel 944.⁴ In our view SVN has taken necessary actions qualifying provisional government for recognition and we should proceed promptly to recognize since Malaysia and Thailand have already done so. Clarifying statement on death of Diem and Nhu issued at press conference of Military Committee this morning (see septel).⁵ While statement perhaps not as candid as we might wish, it provides as much detail as provisional government likely release at this time. Believe that prompt action to reunite Nhu children with their mother provides compensating factor vis-a-vis public opinion.

Following is draft Embassy reply to Foreign Office note contained Embtel 944:

“The Embassy of the United States of America has the honor to acknowledge the receipt of Ministry of Foreign Affairs note no. 4386/ PR dated 5 November 1963, concerning recent events in South Vietnam, the formation and composition of the provisional government, and the policies the provisional government intends to follow in its internal and external relations. For its part the Government of the United States of America shares with the provisional government of the Republic of Vietnam the strong hope that the cordial relations between our two countries will continue as in the past and develop further to our mutual benefit in the future. (Complimentary close.)”

Request Department urgent approval or comment on above draft.⁶ Suggest Department permit us discretion as to time of delivery of US reply. We will keep Department informed re plans for delivery. On publicity, we do not feel strongly but inclined to think on balance it is best to play announcement of recognition in low key. This perhaps best accomplished by release to press in Saigon after delivery of note.⁷

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Limit Distribution. Received at 4:41 a.m. and passed to the White House at 4:51 a.m.

² In telegram 719, November 4, the Department of State asked for the Embassy's views on U.S recognition of the new government in South Vietnam. The Department specifically asked if the requirements for U.S. recognition had been met and whether an official clarifying statement by the new government on the deaths of Diem and Nhu would make such a recognition easier. (*Ibid.*, POL 16 S VIET)

³ In telegram 735, November 5, the Department of State reiterated that a clarifying statement concerning the deaths of the Ngo brothers would "conclude definitely this aspect of recent events and be generally helpful outside SVN." (*Ibid.*)

⁴ In telegram 944, November 6, the Embassy sent the text of a South Vietnamese note of November 5 announcing the abolition of the Diem government and establishment of a provisional government. The note also expressed the new government's desire for continued good relations with the United States. (*Ibid.*, POL 27 S VIET)

⁵ Information Minister Tran Tu Oai stated at a news conference on November 6 that Diem and Nhu died by "accidental suicide." Oai claimed that they were shot to death when Nhu attempted to grab the pistol of the officer arresting them.

⁶ The Department approved the draft in telegram 742 to Saigon, November 6, and instructed the Embassy to deliver it at 7:30 a.m. Saigon time, November 8. The Department also suggested that Lodge inform General Minh in confidence on the evening of November 7 of the impending recognition. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 16 S VIET)

⁷ On November 7, the Department of State released a statement of recognition of the new government; see American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1963, p. 879.

302. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 6, 1963, 5 p.m.

949. Eyes only for President, pass White House directly, no other distribution whatever. Now that the revolution has occurred, I assume you will not want my weekly reports, pursuant to Deptel 576,² to continue, although I will, of course, gladly continue them if you desire. Herewith a "wrap-up" report for the week ending November 6.

Question: Are we gaining or losing on balance and day by day in the contest with the Viet Cong?

Answer: I believe prospects of victory are much improved, provided the Generals stay united. Thompson of the British Advisory Mission thinks that, in such an event, the war could be considerably shortened as compared with the period estimated during the Diem regime. General Harkins concurs.

General Harkins says that during the past week "the Revolutionary Committee was greatly preoccupied with matters relating to the coup. However, they did not lose sight of the necessity to keep a weather eye out for the counter-insurgency effort. While VN initiated activity diminished, it did not come to a halt. VC activity, on the other hand, remained fairly constant. On balance, while the VN cannot be credited with gaining, they lost no ground".

Question 2: Is the government responding to our threefold need for improvement in (a) campaign against the Viet Cong; (b) internal developments and (c) actions affecting relations between American people and government?

Answer: On (a) General Minh intends—and I expect—a stepped-up campaign against the Viet Cong. General Harkins is also optimistic about this.

Under (b) it is obvious that there have been revolutionary internal political developments.

Under (c) the whole trend of the new crowd is to have warm and cordial relations with the American people and government. General Harkins says: "We have found the attitudes of the Vietnamese in their relations with their American advisers to be extremely cordial and open."

Question 3: What does the evidence suggest on the strengthening or weakening of effectiveness of GVN in relation to its own people?

Answer: Evidence suggests much strengthening of the relationship of the new government with its own people.

It is evident even to a foreigner who does not speak Vietnamese that the coup is very popular. People cheer the American flag; they are free to express their loathing of the "family" and the pagodas are full of smiling people.

Crowds gather in front of newspaper offices waiting for papers. Although newspapers understandably do not yet show much individuality of editorial opinion, they already reflect variety in coverage of important news stories. Perhaps local reporters no longer simply accepting Vietnam Press and Information Directorate handouts but going out seeking news.

Question 4: And more specifically what effect are we getting from our own actions under Deptel 534³ and what modifications in either direction do you think advisable?

Answer: Now that we have a few days' perspective since the coup, we can say that we got a great effect from our actions under Deptel 534.

1. At the time of the pagoda raids of August 21, U.S.G. and GVN seemed to be totally deadlocked. Diem and Nhu evidently thought that the US was hooked; it seemed that we were on the horns of a dilemma in which we were forced either to do nothing or else to injure the war effort and dangerously lower the basic living standard of the people-or else to act like a colonial power. There seemed to be nothing which would hurt Diem and Nhu which would not hurt us as much, if not more. We were being totally taken for granted by the GVN; we were never asked to do even the smallest favor.
2. We began to show our displeasure. Responding to the President's declaration in Washington, I adopted a policy of silence and of simple correctness in relations with Diem and Nhu. In this period I privately gave advice to Diem and Nhu which, had they followed it, would have resulted in their being alive today. Then there were these facts:

our failure to provide any US planes or naval vessels, as was customary, for the October 26 National Day ceremonies; the Voice of America broadcasts on the dignity of man and human freedom; and, particularly the evident indignation caused to Americans by Madame Nhu's statement regarding US junior officers,⁴ which impressed Vietnamese. Our evident determination to give asylum to Tri Quang was much noticed. Also, we did not, as we had done in the past, turn over coup information to GVN.

3. When the effect of the withholding of commercial import payments, coupled with the withholding of payments to Colonel Tung started to be felt, cracks began to appear in the blank wall, and it was evident that we were getting some room for maneuver. There was a loosening up of the masonry and signs that we were no longer being taken completely for granted. Diem's message to me through Thuan, Diem's own questions to me Sunday, October 27 at Dalat and on last Friday morning, all may have marked a new attitude on his part, or the beginnings of one. Vice President Tho's evident approval of what we were doing and [*less than 1 line not declassified*] evident last minute desire to get on the right side of the US were noteworthy straws in the wind. We really seemed to be getting some leverage.
4. There is no doubt that the coup was a Vietnamese and a popular affair, which we could neither manage nor stop after it got started and which we could only have influenced with great difficulty. But it is equally certain that the ground in which the coup seed grew into a robust plant was prepared by us and that the coup would not have happened with [when] it did without our preparation. General Don as much as said this to me on November 3. Our actions made the people who could do something about it start thinking hard about how to get a change of government.
5. Another indication of this was the statement made on the radio by Vietnamese speakers on the day of the coup that the Diem-Nhu regime had deprived the country of US aid without which the Communists would gain and that the Army's coup would enable the country to get this economic aid and thus survive. This was not in any proclamations put out officially by the Generals' committee, but it was widely said by nameless "authorized spokesmen". Ex-Minister of Health De has also emphasized importance our action on aid.
6. All this may be a useful lesson in the use of US power for those who face similar situation in other places in the future. The President, the State Department, the military, the AID, the USIS, and the CIA deserve credit for this result. Without united action by the US Government, it would not have been possible. Many Americans in

Saigon were required suddenly to start thinking differently, a difficult thing to do. The fact that they did so is creditable.

7. Perhaps the US Government has here evolved a way of not being everywhere saddled with responsibility for autocratic governments simply because they are anti-Communist—a course which can eventually lead many people to believe that the foreign Communist autocracy which they don't know is preferable to the local autocracy which they do know. Nothing could put the cause of freedom into a stronger position than for those on the side of freedom to be able to clean their own house and not be so often in a situation in which we have to put up with autocrats at the very worst or at the best with Colonel Blimps in order to avoid being taken over by Communism. The ingenuity which was shown in working out a way to put pressure on Diem and Nhu without endangering the war effort, and without lowering the basic living standard of the people made a most valuable contribution. Clearly the coup has brought about a change; let us hope it will turn out to be a great improvement.
8. In a country like this, exhortations, argument, rhetoric, and facial expressions mean very little. Actions apparently are an international language. But they must not be “colonial” actions, only the kind of pressure which partners can put on each other. Our actions were not “colonial” and when Madame Nhu accused me of acting like the Governor General of Indochina, it did not ring true.
9. The prospects now are for a shorter war, thanks to the fact that there is this new government, provided the Generals stay together. Certainly officers and soldiers who can pull off an operation like this should be able to do very well on the battlefield if their hearts are as much in it.
10. My thanks to you and all those associated with you for comprehending [comprehensive] and imaginative guidance and support.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET Top Secret. Received in two parts at 6:47 and 8:11 a.m. and passed to the White House at 7:40 and 8:35 a.m.

² Document 195.

³ Document 181.

⁴ See [footnote 3. Document 158](#).

303. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 6, 1963, 6 p.m.

951. CINCPAC for POLAD. Two characteristics of new provisional GVN stand out: 1) largely made up of technicians and not politicians; and 2) military clearly have upper hand.

Regarding 1) above, no political figures appear in government and all civilian members, with possible exception of Quang (Rural Affairs), have only non-political professional and technical experience in their fields. Some of them are considered by Mission personnel to be competent, honest public servants, but at least two (Tinh, National Economy, and Cung, Premier's Office) have reputations of being careful bureaucratic types. Quang (Rural Affairs), Lam (Foreign Affairs) and Giang (Labor) stand out as the best civilian appointments. Giang maintains excellent relations with CVTC, whose leaders are known to be pleased with appointment. Most members of new government are southerners and Buddhists.

Regarding 2) above, Revolutionary Military Council holds legislative and executive powers "pending amendment of constitution" and President of Council, "Big" Minh is Chief of State. Council "entrusts" executive power to provisional government, whose members are chosen by Premier Tho but subject Council's approval. Moreover, Chief of State Minh, Minister of Defense Don, and Minister of Security Dinh, in addition to being members of Revolutionary Military Council, are Chairman and Deputy Chairmen respectively of Council's executive committee.

As might be expected, complaints about new government already being registered by Vietnamese, primarily by those with histories of political activity and, presumably, political ambitions. While Embassy sampling still small, such complaints center on fact government 1) non-political and technical; 2) allegedly lacks vision and drive to solve Vietnam's problems; and, therefore, 3) cannot long maintain support of people. Additional complaints heard: 1) large percentage members of government pro-French, and 2) various elements in Vietnamese political life not represented.

Countering above criticism, based on all available samplings by Embassy, rank and file of population delighted at end of Diem regime and army unquestionably has wide popular support for its initiative. Nhu's death not regretted; Diem's death regretted but not to extent of detracting from army's popularity.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Confidential; Priority. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 7:06 a.m. and passed to the White House at 7:30 a.m.

304. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, November 6, 1963—7:50 p.m.

746. Eyes only for Ambassador Lodge from the President. Reference your 949.² Your message makes a fitting ending to the weekly reports which you have sent in response to our 576,³ and from now on I think we should be in touch as either of us feels the need, but without this particular process of continuous watching on a specific set of questions.

Your own leadership in pulling together and directing the whole American operation in South Vietnam in recent months has been of the greatest importance, and you should know that this achievement is recognized here throughout the Government.

Now that there is a new Government which we are about to recognize, we must all intensify our efforts to help it deal with its many hard problems. As you say, while this was a Vietnamese effort, our own actions made it clear that we wanted improvements, and when these were not forthcoming from the Diem Government, we necessarily faced and accepted the possibility that our position might encourage a change of government. We thus have a responsibility to help this new government to be effective in every way that we can, and in these first weeks we may have more influence and more chance to be helpful than at any time in recent years.

I am particularly concerned myself that our primary emphasis should be on effectiveness rather than upon external appearances. If the new Government can limit confusion and intrigue among its members, and concentrate its energies upon the real problems of winning the contest against the Communists and holding the confidence of its own people, it will have met and passed a severe test. This is what we must help in, just at it was ineffectiveness, loss of popular confidence, and the prospect of defeat that were decisive in shaping our relations to the Diem regime.

I am sure that much good will come from the comprehensive review of the situation which is now planned for Honolulu,⁴ and I look forward to your own visit to Washington so that you and I can review the whole situation together and face to face.

With renewed appreciation for a fine job, John F. Kennedy.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Top Secret; Priority. The text of this message was sent by McGeorge Bundy at the White House to the Department of State for transmission to Saigon.

² Document 302.

³ Document 195.

⁴ November 19-20; see [Document 321](#).

305. Memorandum From Michael V. Forrestal of the
National Security Council Staff to the President's Special
Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, November 7, 1963.

Scotty Reston's piece in yesterday's *Times*² raised the old shibboleth of negotiations with the North Vietnamese looking toward unification and neutralization. He linked this with criticism of the "let's get back to the war" spirit.

Wouldn't it make sense for the USG to reiterate the statements which the President made more than a year ago defining the reason why we are present in South Vietnam giving assistance and advice.³ The President made the point, as I remember, that our only interest was to help South Vietnam defend itself against subversive aggression from the north. He then said that if Hanoi would cease its aggressive interference in South Vietnam the need for our advisory presence would disappear and we would withdraw.⁴

More recently we have added a gloss to this formula and implied (in the NSC statement of last month)⁵ that we would also withdraw the bulk of our personnel as soon as the South Vietnamese were able to cope for themselves. Secretary McNamara and General Taylor estimated that this might occur in 1965.

It seems to me that these two thoughts might be reiterated by Lodge in Saigon in connection with an announcement about our resumption of aid. Alternatively the President could say something like this at his next press conference,⁶ if the subject comes up or we could have a Department spokesman do it at some appropriate time next week.

I have asked Roger for his opinion; he says he will think about it.

Mike

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Bundy wrote the following response on the source text: "MVF/ I'm for this as background stuff right now and as a quote in [illegible—any?] speech-and to be worked into [illegible—any?] press conference. McGB."

The typewritten words "Draft-November 7, 1963," were crossed out on the source text.

² Entitled "Why a Truce in Korea and Not in Vietnam?", The New York Times, November 6, 1963.

³ Statements made at news conferences of February 7 and 14, 1962; see Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1962, pp. 121-122 and 136-137.

⁴ Apparent reference to a statement at a news conference of September 12, 1963; see *ibid.*, 1963, p. 673.

⁵ Document 170.

⁶ At his press conference of November 14, the President stated, in response to a question, that the U.S. objective in South Vietnam was "to bring Americans home, permit the Vietnamese to maintain themselves as a free and independent country, and permit democratic forces within the country to operate-which they can, of course, much more freely when the assault from the inside, which is manipulated from the north, is ended." For the transcript of the press conference, see Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1963, pp. 845-853.

306. Memorandum From the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hilsman) to the Secretary of State¹

Washington, November 8, 1963.

SUBJECT

JCS Comments on Department of State Research Memorandum RFE-90²

We appreciate receiving the detailed comment by the Joint Chiefs of Staff relevant to INR's Research Memorandum RFE-90, Statistics on the War Effort in South Vietnam Show Unfavorable Trends, October 22, 1963 (Attachments A and B³ respectively). We concur fully with Secretary McNamara's view that we should not issue military appraisals without seeking the views of the Department of Defense, nor have we done so in this instance.

You may be assured that our working level officers maintain close contact with the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and with General Krulak's office. As noted in the first page of the Research Memorandum, all statistics used in this report were compiled by DIA and by General Krulak's office. Recognizing limitations in these statistics, we have explained at some length, in the first two pages of our report, how the statistics are incomplete, sometimes unreliable, and omit other factors that are important but cannot be quantified. However, the statistics selected are among those regularly highlighted by the Military Assistance Command (MAC) and DIA in its weekly briefings of State's Vietnam Working Group. We recall that Generals Krulak and Wheeler, during last spring's discussions at CIA on the South Vietnam National Intelligence Estimate,⁴ declared that these statistics, then running in favor of the Vietnam Government, were not given sufficient emphasis in the estimate.

While it is true that the data in our report cover largely a period of only seven weeks (actually, three sets of figures extend over nineteen weeks), it should be noted that MACV and joint US mission reports from Saigon on trends and developments in the counterinsurgency program, including statistical compilations, often examine much shorter periods.

We naturally agree that military assessments are basically the responsibility of the Department of Defense. However, the unique and

varied political factors involved in the insurgency in South Vietnam and the continuing political crisis since May led us to investigate the possibility that the counterinsurgency effort may have been adversely affected during this period. Indeed, over the past few years we have similarly made intermittent political-military assessments of progress and problems in South Vietnam.

We would like to comment briefly on two assertions in the Joint Chiefs of Staff memorandum. It claims as a favorable indicator "the rise of confidence and fighting efficiency of the Vietnamese military forces." (Page 2) We agree that these qualities have improved generally over the past few years but we believe that morale nonetheless has been adversely affected in recent months. The US Military Attache in Saigon reported last month that the Vietnamese Deputy Commander of Corps III feared mass desertions among his troops, possibly as high as 80%.

The JCS memorandum also claims that the armed strength of the Viet Cong has decreased. While it is true that the present estimate (October 1963) of Viet Cong strength, as reported by MACV, is lower than the previous estimate of last March, it should be noted that MACV has changed the criteria for determining the Viet Cong order of battle. In its October report, MACV states:

"In previous editions of the MACV Viet Cong OB, an arbitrary figure of 100 personnel per company and 30 per platoon was assigned in those cases where hard evidence was lacking upon which to base a strength computation. Commencing with this edition, all strength estimates have been based on evidence obtained from prisoner-of-war estimates or from captured documents."

Thus there is no basis for comparing the most recent estimate with those of six months and one year ago.

In conclusion, we note that a very recent CIA report,⁵ prepared independently of our analysis, concurred with our findings using essentially the same statistical indicators and the same time period.

Tab A

DRAFT MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT

Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research Estimate of Military Situation in South Vietnam

1. The Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research has published and distributed a memorandum (Tab B) which concludes that, as of 22 October, the military situation in Vietnam may have reverted to the condition of six months to one year previous. This conclusion respecting the military aspect of the Vietnam war is derived from an evaluation of four statistical factors: casualties, weapons losses, defectors and Viet Cong incidents covering an eleven-week period from 1 July to 18 September 1963. In short, the paper makes a broad military judgement of a complex combat situation, derived from a survey of a limited number of factors in a limited period of time.
2. In confining itself to the four indices mentioned, the memorandum does not take into account fundamental military considerations which should weigh heavily in any appraisal of the progress of the campaign. These include such factors as:
 - a. Growth in the character and intensity of the Vietnamese offensive effort—air, sea and ground—over the past year.
 - b. Degree of pacification achieved in the plateau and coastal prams.
 - c. Strategic and tactical implications of the shift in Vietnamese offensive effort to the Viet Cong stronghold in the Delta.
 - d. Nature of the Viet Cong tactical reaction as they are compressed into a progressively smaller area.
3. The conclusion that a major military retrogression has occurred ignores various substantial indices of military progress which include:
 - a. The rise in confidence and fighting efficiency of the Vietnamese military forces.
 - b. Increases in freedom of movement and increased use of the roads and rail lines, particularly in the north and central regions. (The memorandum would lead one to believe that the freedom of movement had decreased.)
 - c. The number of people resettled in strategic hamlets (population now in hamlets—9.7 million; 6 months ago—about 6 million; 12 months ago—less than 2 million).
 - d. The number of strategic hamlets organized, built and equipped (number of completed hamlets now—over 8,300; 6 months ago—6,000; 12 months ago—3,000).
 - e. Number of village and hamlet radios installed and in use, bringing a new level of security to rural regions (5,200 radios now installed; six months ago—2,500; 12 months ago—1,300).
 - f. The steady diminution in the strength of Viet Cong forces (present estimate—about 93,000; estimate six months ago—114,000; estimate 12

months ago—123,000).

- g. The numbers of paramilitary forces trained and equipped (total to date—188,000; six months ago—151,000; 12 months ago—53,000).
4. Apart from the above omissions, the following points in the memorandum also warrant attention:
- a. The paper projects unfavorable end-1963 values for three of the four statistical factors, based upon an extrapolation of the selected eleven-week period to the end of the year. Extrapolation of a limited sample must be heavily discounted, since graphic representation of those military factors considered in the paper plot irregularly over any short period of time. Trends, and trends only, may be detected—through the general upward or downward direction of the overall trace—while extension of any rising or descending period can produce deceptive results. Indeed, in the 6 weeks following the cut-off date of the State evaluation, the number of Viet Cong attacks, for example, decreased by about 40%. Using the same extrapolative method of estimate employed in the State paper would result in the unlikely conclusion that, by end—1963, there would be no Viet Cong attacks whatsoever.
 - b. The paper points out that the “Chieu Hoi” Amnesty Program rates have decreased from 3,200 per month to about 1,600 per month, and uses this as part of the basis for its conclusions regarding a military retrogression. The paper fails, however, to take note of the more important fact that twelve months ago there was no Chieu Hoi Program at all, and that surrenders were rare. To date the program has already collected about 14,000 persons. When the effort was initiated in the Spring of 1963 a large wave of persons came over to the Vietnamese side. The monthly rate has since decreased from the high initial figure, but is continuing to bring in substantial numbers daily. The reservoir of potential returnees, of course, is also diminishing, since 9-1/2 million of the 12 million rural residents are already in strategic hamlets.
5. It is the judgment of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, based on an appraisal of all of the relevant factors up to 1 November, that the military situation should be appraised as follows—As of that date the GVN offensive effort has not achieved the optimum levels envisaged in the National Campaign Plan, but is on the way thereto. Meanwhile, the Viet Cong have been reacting sharply to the intensification of operations in the Delta area. Coup plotting in Saigon, as well as genuine doubt regarding US intentions deriving from our economic sanctions against the GVN, have operated against a more vigorous prosecution of the campaign. Overall, the military campaign is still

progressing favorably and clearly has not been “set back to the point it occupied six months ago.”

6. About 40 copies of the State Department document have already been distributed to the White House, to various offices of USIA, AID, CIA and the Departments of State and Defense, and a request has already been received, at the action officer level, for Joint Chiefs of Staff concurrence in release of the document to Senator Hickenlooper and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. While the study has little importance in itself, the diffusion of its inaccurate military conclusions could have unfavorable effects, since it contradicts publicly announced Department of Defense estimates on these military matters.
7. Accordingly, it is recommended that the matter be brought to the attention of the Secretary of State, either orally or in the form of a memorandum, as attached hereto.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam, JCS Comments on RFE-90. Secret; No Foreign Dissem. Initialed by Rusk. Attached was a copy of a letter from Rusk to McNamara, November 8, which reads as follows:

“Confirming our telephone conversation about INR's research memorandum RFE-90 of October 22, 1963, it is not the policy of the State Department to issue military appraisals without seeking the views of the Defense Department. I have requested that any memorandum given interdepartmental circulation which includes military appraisals be coordinated with your Department.”

² See [Document 205](#).

³ Tab B contained the substance of Tab A in the form of a draft letter from McNamara to Rusk.

⁴ See [vol. III, p. 232](#) .

⁵ Not further identified.

307. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 8, 1963, 4 p.m.

976. 1. Call on Pham Dang Lam, new Foreign Minister:

2. He expressed his great appreciation that the U.S. had been so prompt in extending recognition to the new Government of Viet-Nam. Out of our conversation emerged the following:

3. The government was going to step up the war effort in the military sense and also as regards a program of social justice. He stressed particularly lessening the burden of forced labor out in the countryside which had been much too heavy during the Diem regime; and consolidating and improving the strategic hamlets which were, by and large, unpopular because of the burdens that they imposed on the population, because they did not fulfill all of the needs of the true community, and because, in all too many cases, the individual did not think the hamlets increased his security against the Viet Cong.

4. Although I brought up the matter of exorbitant taxes and land ownership, he appeared to think they were not as important as the ones that he mentioned.

5. When he asked me my advice, I said I hoped that General Minh would be able to spend a few minutes from time to time in making the public feel that he had a warm approach to the public. This warmth had been very much lacking in the previous administration. I thought that if he would arrange to visit some of the pagodas, if only for twenty minutes, and shake hands and sign some autographs, it would fill a need which all people feel, regardless of race or geography, of being courted by political leaders. General Minh had great prestige and was a personable man, and I felt sure this would do a lot of good and would cost nothing. I also hoped that he would arrange to drop in in a helicopter on various units in the field, asking a few questions and then leave, and that this would also have a good result.

6. When he pressed me for more advice, I said that it was vitally important, now that the Buddhists were in the big majority in the

government, to avoid any action which could possibly, by any stretch of the imagination, appear to be anti-Christian. Anything like this could be utterly disastrous to world opinion regarding Viet-Nam. He agreed emphatically.

7. I also thought they could do a much better job on press relations than had been done by the previous administration, and I made a few elementary suggestions on that subject.

8. I hoped Ngo Dinh Can would be treated with leniency. Lam seemed to think this would be the case and that he was really now in protective custody. I said if he were assassinated, it would be unspeakable and offered to fly him out of the country if GVN desired.

9. When I asked him whom I should call on, he said that as I had called on General Minh, General Don, and General Kim, I had really done enough. But then he reflected and said, although protocol does not call for it, he would be personally very happy if I were to call on General Dinh, and impress upon him the great importance of not having any police state methods of government, in particular, the most unfortunate practice which prevailed in the previous regime, of taking young girls out of the house in the middle of the night and off to some concentration camp. He was glad to see that General Dinh had made a declaration along these lines. He said that the "top" was all right, but the thing was to get the order carried out in the lower levels. He did not seem to think I needed to call on anybody else.

10. He said he had only accepted his crushing post which was so much beyond his powers because of his belief that he could count on U.S. help. I assured him that he could.

11. They had had high hopes about an accord with Cambodia and had even planned to open full-fledged Embassy there, but Sihanouk's latest action had shelved all that and was most depressing.³

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret; Limit Distribution.

³ Conlon wrote the following comment at this point: "sad but true".

308. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 8, 1963, 5 p.m.

977. CINCPAC for POLAD. Foreign Minister Lam (protect source) asked Political Counselor to meet with him yesterday afternoon for informal talk. Emphasizing that he speaking on strictly personal basis, Lam inquired re public reactions to coup in U.S. After fill-in from press summaries, Lam remarked that U.S. could not avoid charge of having backed or supported coup regardless of outcome. He noted two contradictory rumors in Saigon that U.S. backed coup primarily because (1) U.S. convinced Nhu had contacts and dealing with DRV for neutral solution Vietnamese problem; and (2) U.S. desired change of regime in order obtain new group more amenable neutral solution. Latter rumor obviously naive but indicative of current confused attitudes. Lam expressed strong hope for early U.S. recognition to clear air and help legitimize provisional government, although noting Foreign Minister formal request for recognition only circulated on Wednesday.²

Lam then turned to current problems of new government and appealed for continued U.S. advice and support in days ahead. He noted that relationship between Military Revolutionary Committee and executive headed by Prime Minister Tho not clearly spelled out and Ministers still feeling their way. However, he believed relationship likely evolve in such manner that executive would run day-to-day affairs of government but with close consultation with military committee on broad policies.

Lam expressed deep concern over possible dangers in organization of police under new government. He felt appointment of General Xuan as head of National Police placed ex-Surete type in key position where he could carry out program of arrests, intimidations and reprisals reminiscent of Nhu. This coupled with appointment of headstrong, impetuous General Dinh as Minister of Security created situation which would bear close watching. Lam labeled reorganization of police and their reorientation to protection of civil liberties as "number one problem of provisional government." Similarly there was need to assure populace of impartial administration of justice both in cities and countryside.

With regard to general approach and image of new executive, Lam considered it essential that there be rather sharp contrast between its approach to populace and that of previous regime. For example, new administration should shed itself of trappings of obvious security measures for movements of Prime Minister and should emphasize simplicity and desire to keep in touch with the people. Bureaucracy should be instructed that advancement dependent on performance alone and that employees should concentrate on discharging their responsibilities and eschew petty politics. Lam said he had discussed above with Tho, who was in a like mind.

Lam had no idea how long transition period between provisional and elected government would be, but believed in principle it should be as short as possible consistent with successful prosecution of the war. In this connection he inquired as to VC reaction in the countryside, which EmbOff provided based on latest MACV reporting.

Lam expressed some concern over French attitudes and policy in present circumstances and for future. He asked to be informed if we received any information as to when (or in Ambassador Lalouette would return to Saigon.

Lam said there would be some reshuffling of functions at FonMin. With regard to post of Secretary General, he said he was considering list of candidates among whom mutual friend appeared prominently (probably Lien, former Counselor of Embassy in Washington).

Lam noted that Ambassador Ly was being recalled for consultation and that despite previous indications that he would return to Vietnam, nothing had been heard from former Ambassador Chuong. He added that if we had suggestions as to likely candidates for Ambassador to Washington he would welcome them on personal basis.

In closing, Lam reemphasized personal nature his remarks and his hope U.S. Government would soon grant recognition to the new provisional government.

Comment: Re penultimate paragraph, believe we might well offer suggestions, but be wary of limiting choice to a particular individual. In this connection understand from Ambassador D'Orlandi that tentative feelers have been made to Thuan by General Don.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Limit Distribution. Repeated to CINCPAC. Received at 11:13 a.m., November 9, and passed to the White House at 11:25 a.m.

² November 6.

309. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 11, 1963, 6 p.m.

991. During a conversation at a social function, General Don made the following points:

1. That the exorbitant amount of forced labor which had been required of people in the Strategic Hamlets in order to construct the Strategic Hamlets had been and was being drastically reduced. The previous regime, he said, had gone about the Strategic Hamlet program in the wrong way, even though the idea itself is excellent.
2. He was pleased with my congratulations on the statement deploring arbitrary arrests and was determined to adhere to it.
3. He was well aware of the unspeakable results which would flow from any kind of anti-Christian attitude and was determined that such a thing would not happen.
4. When I asked whether General Minh was going to meet the people and do some handshaking and give some autographs, he said that as a military man, General Minh did not like doing that kind of thing, even though he, Don, realized it was important.
5. Like labor leader Tran Quoc Buu, Don felt particularly strong about the elimination of the "caiz"—the Chinese racketeers and extortionists who get between the laboring man and the employer and extort very substantial sums of money. He said that Diem at the beginning of his rule was very vigorous about the Chinese community and enunciated absolutely correct policies, but that eventually the Chinese "took him over." Don said it was "symbolic that as Diem reached the end of his career he sought refuge among the Chinese in Cholon, thereby showing the extent to which he had fallen under their influence." The new government was prepared to be ruthless he said, in preventing Chinese racketeering and extortion. He was emotional about this point.
6. He repeated that new regime was determined to step up the war.
7. Altogether a sound program convincingly started.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 2 S VIET. Secret.
Received at 7:25 a.m. and passed to the White House at 7:42 a.m.

310. Telegram From Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff to the Deputy Director, Far Eastern Division, Directorate of Plans, Central Intelligence Agency (Colby), at Saigon¹

Washington, November 11, 1963—3:27 p.m.

It now appears at least possible that Mme. Nhu will undertake an intense political campaign in US against both USG and new GVN. It may thus become necessary to make clear the exact quality of her own performance and that of her husband and his brothers and to show both evidence of and reasons for her and their intense unpopularity among Vietnamese people. You should stimulate fullest analysis and reporting on this topic. We are interested in hard facts, and not simply in broad conclusions, however intensely supported by country team.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Sent via CIA channels. On November 2, at McCone's suggestion, the President approved sending Colby to Saigon to assess the situation there. Colby, in *Honorable Men*, pp. 217-220, recalls his impressions and highlights of the mission, which began on November 3 and ended on November 19.

311. Memorandum From the Deputy Regional Planning Adviser of the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (Mendenhall) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman)¹

Washington, November 12, 1963.

SUBJECT
U.S. Policy on Vietnam

An editorial in the New York Times on November 10² and a column by James Reston a few days earlier³ suggested strongly that the U.S. should undertake international negotiations for settlement of the Vietnam problem.

We believe that these suggestions by highly reputable journalists may cause suspicions and questions to arise on the part of the new GVN about U.S. policy and intentions. GVN Foreign Minister Lam has told the Embassy that a rumor is already circulating in Saigon that the U.S. supported the change in regime in Vietnam to obtain a new group more amenable to a neutral situation.⁴

Part of the Vietnamese suspicions, especially with respect to the neutralization of South Vietnam, should be allayed by the Secretary's November 8 press conference.⁵ However, the Times November 10 editorial still leaves the picture blurred by suggesting that U.S. policy be carried further by calling for an international conference on Vietnam.

To insure that U.S. policy is correctly understood by the GVN, the Vietnamese people, the American public and the world at large, we propose the following actions:

1. A telegram to Embassy Saigon (Tab A)⁶ proposing that the GVN be reassured on our policy. Request that you initial this cable, obtain White House clearance and forward to the Secretary for signature.
2. A statement by the President at his Thursday press conference⁷ in response to a planted question. We suggest that the President reiterate our policy on Vietnam, including our view that there is nothing to be negotiated at an international conference.

3. A background conversation by you with Reston and the appropriate Times editor⁸ to try to set them straight on the situation in Vietnam and on U.S. policy regarding Vietnam.

Mr. Koren concurs in the above, but Mr. Manell has further views with respect to the second and third suggestions.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Confidential. Attached to the source text was a handwritten note from Forrestal to McGeorge Bundy which reads as follows: "Mac: I think the President should do this in light of N.Y. Times campaign which must be causing worries in Saigon. Mike".

² The editorial, entitled "A Policy for Vietnam," also called for American consideration of the neutralization of Vietnam.

³ See [Document 305](#).

⁴ See [Document 308](#).

⁵ For the transcript of Rusk's press conference of November 8, in which there were questions and answers on Vietnam, see Department of State Bulletin, November 11, 1963, pp. 810-817.

⁶ The draft cable (Tab A) was not attached, but for the cable as sent, see [Document 315](#).

⁷ Although the President answered a number of questions about Vietnam in his press conference of Thursday, November 14, he did not address the question of an international conference on Vietnam. For the transcript, see Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1963, pp. 845-853.

⁸ See [Document 313](#).

312. Memorandum for the Record of Discussion at the Daily White House Staff Meeting¹

Washington, November 13, 1963, 8 a.m.

1. Mr. Bundy presided throughout the meeting.
2. Vietnam. Someone mentioned the Halberstam attack on General Harkins in the New York Times.² Both Bundy and Forrestal thought it was very unfortunate. When Dungan jokingly asked Forrestal if he didn't like to overthrow established order, Forrestal replied that he did not like to do it in public, and added that certainly no one wanted Halberstam driving General Harkins around Saigon in an APC. Everyone seemed pleased that Halberstam would be leaving Saigon soon for another post.

The discussion then turned to the forthcoming Honolulu meeting. Bundy remarked that the agenda seemed to be full of briefings and asked Forrestal if something could be done about that or whether they would have to have some dinners on the side to do some real talking. Forrestal replied that the only way to break it up was to do as McNamara did, which was to interrupt loudly in the middle of any mechanical briefing. From this exchange, it became clear that at least Bundy and Forrestal now plan to do most of their work outside the meetings. When someone asked Bundy why he was going, he replied that he had been instructed.

Mr. McCone is going out early to see Ambassador Lodge before the meeting starts. Bundy thought this was a fine step, and remarked that if we could just get the ax-Eisenhower Administration people together, everything would be fine.

The newspaper report in the *Times*³ this morning on the Honolulu meeting gave the impression the [that] important work may be going on out there, making it unnecessary for Lodge to come to Washington. This is to be cleared up today, with the purpose being to explain that Lodge will still have good reason to come to Washington.

USIA may send someone to the meeting, and there is also talk of having Maechling also be present.

[Here follows discussion of matters unrelated to Vietnam.]

¹ Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by W. Y Smith.

² In his front-page article, "Saigon Coup Hurts Position of Harkins," Halberstam stated the military junta considered Harkins "a symbol of the old order." They resented his earlier assessments that the Buddhist crisis and the politics of the Ngo family were not adversely affecting the war effort and did not trust him with their coup plans. Conversely, Halberstam claimed Lodge's position among the Generals had risen since the coup. Halberstam reported policy differences between Lodge and Harkins over support of the Ngos, claimed Harkins was taken unaware by the coup, and cited "Embassy members" as saying that Harkins had dominated former Ambassador Nolting.

³ See The New York Times, November 13, 1963, front-page article by Jack Raymond, entitled, "High U.S. Officials Meet on Vietnam in Hawaii Nov. 20."

313. Memorandum From Michael V. Forrestal of the
National Security Council Staff to the President's Special
Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, November 13, 1963.

I had a brief talk with Bob Kleiman of the New York Times editorial board this morning. I told him that I thought the Halberstam article in this morning's edition was irresponsible and mostly reflected a personal animus against General Harkins instead of accurate news reporting.² Kleiman admitted that this might be so, but pointed out that there must have been some differences of opinion between the Embassy and MACV, since Halberstam quoted inconsistent Embassy sources and MACV public statements.

Kleiman suggested rather strongly that we move as soon as possible toward a reconvening of the Geneva Conference and a negotiated settlement of the differences between North and South Vietnam. He argued that the political strength of the South will never be as strong again as it will be during the next few months, and that we should seize this opportunity for negotiations before the situation deteriorated and we found ourselves back in a 10-year, Malayan-type effort. In connection with such negotiations he raised the possibility of effecting a mass population transfer in an effort to get all of the Viet Cong moved from the South back up to the North.

I told him that I had great difficulty with this suggestion and thought that it would be folly to pursue this line at the present time. South Vietnam was still not strong enough to approach the bargaining table with any hope of coming away whole. Furthermore, there was no indication that responsible Vietnamese in Vietnam would view the prospects of a new Geneva Conference as anything less than a complete sellout by the U.S. I emphasized that we definitely looked toward the time when South Vietnam would be strong enough to deal with the North on at least a basis of equality. I referred to the President's statement of last year and the NSC statement of last month,³ indicating that the U.S. was prepared to withdraw its presence from South Vietnam as soon as Hanoi ceased its interference in the South or as soon as the South was able to handle the problem on its own. We had not yet reached that point, however. I also questioned whether a population

transfer would be feasible in view of the difficulty of identifying the bulk of the Viet Cong, to say nothing of the political problems involved in a forced emigration.

Kleiman will no doubt continue to peddle his Geneva Conference idea, and we should be preparing ourselves to counter it.

MF

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Confidential.

² See [footnote 2](#), [Document 312](#).

³ Document 170.

314. Memorandum for the Record of a Conversation
Between the Assistant Director for Rural Affairs of the
United States Operations Mission (Phillips) and Prime
Minister Tho¹

Saigon, November 13, 1963.

1. The Prime Minister said that he had been told by people in the Government who had worked in the Strategic Hamlet Program before and by the Generals that I was the American to see about the Strategic Hamlets. He said he wanted my frank views and he would give me his. If there was one thing he reproached in the Americans, he said, it was that they were too diplomatic, they seemed unable to say what they meant. Only by a frank exchange of views could we work together successfully, he said.
2. The Prime Minister then began reminiscing about the days of the Binh Xuyen, Hoa Hao and Cao Dai and how he, Col. Lansdale and Minh had worked together for President Diem on these problems. He said that afterwards he had remained the President's chief advisor until 1959 when he was pushed aside by Mr. Nhu. He had tried to tell the President that his policies were losing the support of the population in the south but the President only called him and Minh "defeatists" and pushed them further aside.
3. He said it was difficult for the Americans to understand what had happened in the Delta and how the support of the population had been lost there but they must understand this now. The truth was that the Government had been losing the war against the VC in the Delta for some time because it had been losing the population. If one wanted to cite statistics, he said, all one needed to do was mention the fact that the total number of VC in the area was greater now than two years ago, yet around 20,000 had supposedly been killed during this same period. But beyond that, he said, he knew first hand what had been happening because he personally knew the people of this region, his region, and they had told him clearly over the past two years why more and more people were fuming to the VC.
4. He said that his home province of An Giang was an example. The Government through forced labor (as much as 100 days per person) had built the hamlets and many other public works (roads and canals). This cost most people the equivalent of at least 1000 piastres either in cash to pay for substitute labor or in losses suffered because

they could not perform other work. At the same time the VC only collected 50 to 100 piastres in taxes. Naturally the people supported the VC—why would they support a Government which was worse than the VC. Many people had come to him, he said, and had broken down in tears over the situation. When Tho would report this to the President, he would be shown long lists of signatures on supposed petitions from people who had “volunteered” their labor. Tho told him that these were fake documents specially prepared by the Province Chief. The President would then talk about his trips to the province and how he was always welcomed by the population. When Tho would try to tell him that it was nothing but a “mise en scene,” he would not listen, and would repeat that Tho was a “defeatist.”

5. Not only did these practices alienate the people, Tho said, but the previous policy of divide and rule employed against the major religious groups (the Hoa Hao, the Cao Dai and the Catholics), as well as against the Khmer ethnic minority, was disastrous. Minh and he, Tho said, had begged the President to allow them to arm them, particularly the Hoa Hao, because they were so firmly anti-communist. The President had been on the point of agreeing, Tho said, when Nhu persuaded him that he could not trust us (Minh and Tho) or the Hoa Hao. The Hoa Hao became discouraged because they were not helped and because when they identified a communist in their midst and turned him over to the provincial authorities he would bribe the responsible government official and be released.
6. Now, Tho said, we must avoid the mistakes of the past. American aid has been rapid and efficient but not always intelligent. Above all we need intelligent assistance and firm support for what is right. The Americans must stand up for their own democratic principles and must always insist that what we do helps and not harms our own people, Tho said.
7. The implementation of the strategic hamlet must be revised, Tho said. We must find a way to lift up the burden placed on our people and we must somehow pay them for their work. Both General Minh and I are realistic, he said. We realize that we too have lost much of the trust of our former supporters in the Delta. The people there have little faith in anyone—the Diem Government was but the last in a long string of Governments of broken promises beginning with the French Colonial Government at the beginning of World War II and continuing through those of Bao Dai.
8. The main ideas for the Delta which General Minh and I have in mind, Tho said, are as follows:
 - a. We will correct the abuses of the past government, such as forced labor, and will do everything possible to raise the morale of the

population in the Delta to give them faith in the Government. This they do not now have.

- b. There is a real need for aggressive local militia seeking out the VC in their areas. As fast as we can be assured of their political loyalty we will train and arm the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai population in the Delta and the remaining Catholic groupings not already armed. Their mission will be mainly local security. We will also win the support of the Khmers and train and arm them—at present they are neutral for the most part.
 - c. We will concentrate on the economic and social development of the hamlets already built to raise the morale of the people, and at the same time provide them with better security which they do not now have.
 - d. We will organize a special effort in the Camau Peninsula to disrupt the VC bases there because this is the main source of funds and trained recruits for the entire VC effort in the Delta. We will do this by training special ranger groups, mainly composed of Hoa Hao, already familiar with the area, who will carry the fight to the VC. They will be backed up by mobile, regular military units to strike against VC concentrations.
 - e. We will build more hamlets and we may move some which are now poorly placed but this will be done very selectively and the people will be paid for their work. There will be no more corvee labor.
 - f. We will form a high-level directing and coordinating committee within the Government for the overall pacification effort.
9. The Prime Minister then asked me to contact Bui Van Luong as soon as possible to discuss with him in detail the hamlet program. Luong's appointment was temporary, Tho said, for about two months to assist in an orderly transfer of the program and of the experience gained with it during the previous government. Tho said there would be a meeting at the end of this week between the Government and the Military Committee to make policy decisions concerning the Strategic Hamlet Program.
10. During the conversation, I mentioned the actions taken to resume aid as instructed by Mr. Brent. I also responded to the Prime Minister's request for specific opinions in regard to the Strategic Hamlet Program as follows:
- a. The Government should form a high-level committee to direct the overall pacification effort of which the Strategic Hamlet Program is a major part.
 - b. The Government should concentrate initially on consolidating existing hamlets and providing them with adequate security and the economic and social benefits promised.

- c. I agreed with him completely that there must be no more corvee labor, that further work should be compensated for in some manner and that USOM would do everything it could to help the Government raise the morale and win the support of the population in the Delta which was the key to defeating the communists in that area.
11. *Comment:* The Prime Minister had obviously been thinking about the problem of pacifying the Delta for many years, and from his constant references to General Minh it was clear that there was a considerable identity of views between them. My impression was that he had a complete grasp of the political realities in the Delta and that for the first time solid progress can be achieved in that area if the U.S. can develop a military and civilian aid program sufficiently flexible to give support when and where needed. I also received the impression, although he did not specifically so state, that the Prime Minister expects General Minh to head the high-level pacification committee.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret. Transmitted to the Department of State under cover of airgram A-327 from Saigon, November 18.

315. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, November 13, 1963—6:17 p.m.

781. At your discretion you may wish reassure GVN that *New York Times* Nov 10 editorial and Reston column few days earlier suggesting new negotiated settlement of Vietnam problem do not represent US Government policy.

Our policy remains as outlined by President Kennedy in December 1961:

"The United States, like the Republic of Vietnam, remains devoted to the cause of peace and our primary purpose is to help [South Vietnam's] people maintain their independence. If the Communist authorities in North Vietnam will stop their campaign to destroy the Republic of Vietnam, the measures we are taking to assist [South Vietnam's] defense efforts will no longer be necessary."² This policy reaffirmed by Secretary at Nov 8 press conference.³

Our goal is thus to return to cease-fire established by 1954 Geneva Accords. If Hanoi will cease and desist in subversive aggression against RVN, and GVN is thereby enabled extend its authority throughout South Vietnam, US will withdraw its forces from South Vietnam because reason for their presence and support of GVN will have ceased exist.

We see no necessity for international negotiations as suggested by *Times* to return to a peaceful SVN free of attempted subversion from outside. Within concept US policy as outlined by President we cannot envisage any points that would be negotiable. Good faith of our withdrawal intentions has already been established by announcement we shall withdraw 1,000 US military personnel by end 1963.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Confidential; Priority. Drafted by Mendenhall and cleared by Hilsman and Forrestal. Repeated to CINCPAC for POLAD, London, Paris,

Bangkok, Ottawa, New Delhi, Vientiane, and Phnom Penh. See [Document 311](#) for the suggestion that this cable be sent.

² The quote is from a letter from Kennedy to Diem, dated December 14 but released December 15, 1961, the full text of which is printed in Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1961, p. 801. All brackets are in the source text.

³ See [footnote 5, Document 311](#).

316. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, November 13, 1963—7:52 p.m.

784. For Ambassador Lodge from the Secretary. Halberstam article carried *New York Times* November 13 (full text sent by wireless file) dealing with military coup readers' feelings regarding General Harkins and different assessments of Vietnamese situation by Harkins and Embassy viewed with serious concern at high levels here. Obvious of course that this type story handicaps effective functioning of Government agencies and complicates problems all of us face in our complex operations relating to Vietnam.

Feel strongly that corrective measures need to be taken in official American community in Saigon to stop this kind of talk with newsmen which only creates internal difficulties within U.S. Government and friction with GVN. While we are aware from previous exchanges with you that it is hard deal with this problem, we regard it of such importance that we request that you re-examine all feasible methods of resolving it to prevent future repetitions.

We leave to your discretion what action to take to offset effects of Halberstam article, and would appreciate your thoughts as to how this might be accomplished.²

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Priority. Drafted by Mendenhall; cleared with Forrestal, Rice, and Manning; and approved by Rusk.

² Lodge responded in telegram 1010 from Saigon, November 14, as follows:

"Have not yet seen Halberstam article but heartily agree that kind of story you describe handicaps effective functioning of government agencies."

He indicated that he would call a country team meeting to urge key members to prevent such news stories, and stated his belief that there were no leaks from the Embassy. He also noted:

“Halberstam has at least twice to my knowledge in the past taken material leaked to the Times in Washington and then sent it back to the U.S. under a Saigon dateline. Do not know whether he has done this in this case.” (*Ibid.*)

317. Memorandum From Michael V. Forrestal of the
National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant
for National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, November 14, 1963.

SUBJECT

Conversation with Ambassador Alphanh

I spoke to Ambassador Alphanh after dinner last night to sound out his views on the French attitude towards the new regime in Saigon. He gave me to understand that France could be expected to recognize the Government soon, although it might do so in a less formal way than the United States.

He asked me what I thought of the prospects for eventual unification and neutralization of North and South Vietnam. I told him that I thought this was a highly unlikely prospect in the foreseeable future, given the relative power balance of the two areas. Ambassador Alphanh said that he thought that the French and U.S. positions were not far apart except on the question of timing. I said that this might be so, but that I had the impression that the French did not take sufficiently into account the problem alluded to by General Minh in his exclusive interview with *Le Monde* several days ago. To be neutral, one had to be strong; and it would take some time to build the necessary strength.

Ambassador Alphanh asked why the United States had been so surprised at General De Gaulle's statement about South Vietnam prior to the coup. I said that we were not so surprised at the substance of the statement as we were at the timing of it and the fact that it was made without consultation. Ambassador Alphanh observed rather sourly that since we never consulted them on Southeast Asia, we should not be surprised if they did not consult us.

I attach two cables (Paris 2324² and 2331³) which shed some more light on the French attitude.

Mike

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous. Secret.

² Telegram 2324, November 13, reads as follows: "French Delegate General De Buzon recently saw DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong. Latter said coup in Saigon, although US-inspired, was step in right direction. US would tire of fighting and in that case DRV would show itself as supple as it is now rigid. It still not the moment for negotiations. Dong hoped French would exert influence on us to see latter observed Geneva Accords of 1954. Reportedly Buzon made no comment and there no plans instruct him pursue matter." (Department of State, Central Files, POL 32-4 VIET)

³ The reference is in error since telegram 2331 from Paris is an unclassified administrative cable. (*Ibid.*, AV 10)

318. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, November 16, 1963—12:50 p.m.

1. Have not seen Halberstam article but I believe that the important matter Ambassador Lodge wishes to talk about in Washington is the replacement of General Harkins.
2. The Vietnamese junta members certainly do consider General Harkins as a symbol of the old order and it is perhaps significant that there is no great depth of contact between U.S. military and the key junta figures. Advisers still have official contact on their military affairs but the Generals are clearly moving in the direction of occupying themselves with the problems of running the country, for which they do not look for advice from the U.S. military. With respect to General Harkins himself, during the pre-coup period, the junta leaders did not feel they could confide in him without fear of repetition to the Palace. MACV as a whole, and specifically General Harkins, were very much caught off base by the coup, in good part because, as he has many times stated, he believed such a development would be unfortunate. Most dramatic example was the briefing given Admiral Felt who departed the very morning of the coup with MACV assertions that no coup would take place. With respect to his assessment of the war, we are on less clear ground as he was talking generally about military and strategic hamlet progress and the opposite view was talking mainly about political dissatisfaction in the cities. Certainly General Harkins' emphasis has been that of a good soldier resolved to take his objective and not being easily deterred by evidence of difficulty or opposition. However, this emphasis on progress and strengthening of the Vietnamese has somewhat obscured the fact that the enemy has only been contained, not reduced in the short term, although containment in this subversive war should lead gradually to reduction.
3. With respect to General Harkins' position vis-a-vis Ambassador Lodge, it is quite clear that the Richardson case was only the overture to the opera. Ambassador Lodge has many positive qualities of political sagacity, courage and meticulous insistence on following specific Washington directives, but the fact is that he is running very much a vest-pocket operation and not a country team or total American effort. This method of operation puts a premium on subordinates who can operate on a tactical level rather than as co-workers in the strategic

vineyard. The relationship of course has been exacerbated by the incident in which Harkins was telling Don that it was not the time to run a coup when the Ambassador was trying to support a Vietnamese effort in this direction, by Harkins' personal intervention with Thuan to dissuade him from resigning on the basis of a very private and sensitive conversation Thuan had with D'Orlandi which was reported to Lodge, and the fact that Harkins was kept out of the coup planning in response to Washington's instructions to Lodge that this be discussed only with CIA. Putting the U.S. effort and the American community into an integrated bundle is made no easier by the absence of any working system of policy coordination, since top level country team meetings are seldom held. On the military side the usual multiplicity of staff and command levels and the emphasis on the statistical approach separate General Harkins from the highly personalized political activities of Lodge.

4. In summary, the junta members have no great love for General Harkins but probably would be content to see him remain on purely technical military level. The Vietnamese themselves are groping around the organizational, bureaucratic and political jungles, trying to turn their convictions and their popular support into specific ways of strengthening the country against its enemy. Ambassador Lodge has established a highly positive image in their eyes and in the eyes of many Vietnamese for his obvious support of the revolution. How this image will bear up against their inevitable day-to-day negotiations and collaboration with the working level American community remains to be seen. If the approach is to be the one outlined by Ambassador Lodge however it will be clear that the members of the community will have to learn to adjust to his style or be replaced.

¹ Source: Declassified Documents, 1977, 94B. Secret; Priority; Eyes Only. The number of this cable was deleted when the document was declassified in 1976.

319. Memorandum for the Record of Conversation
Between the Assistant Director for Rural Affairs of the
United States Operations Mission (Phillips) and President
Minh¹

Saigon, November 18, 1963, 11 a.m.

1. I was informed by General Kim on 17 November that General Minh would like to see me on the 18th. The appointment was originally scheduled for 1700 and moved up to 1100 by a call from General Minh's aide that same morning.
2. General Minh, who I have known personally since 1955, was extremely cordial and friendly. He spoke very personally about how he was now playing a role that he had never wanted to play, how he had been the chief instrument of a coup that he had always wished to avoid. He recalled our last conversation together at a dinner at General Kim's house some 8 months ago in which he had remarked that the Diem Government was in a very steep nose-dive and it was questionable whether it could be pulled out in time. He said that he did not know the answer yet. The new government, he stated, had inherited a truly formidable task beyond what any outsider could realize.
3. Concerning the Strategic Hamlet Program, General Minh said that he had always been in favor of the basic concept which was good, but that it had been misapplied by the previous government and exploited for personal political gain by Mr. Nhu. He agreed that it was absolutely necessary to fulfill the implied promises given to that part of the population involved in the program and to consolidate existing hamlets. At the same time, in those areas in the Delta where mass relocation had occurred, he felt that people should be given the choice of returning to their original homes if they really wanted to do so, or of staying in the Strategic Hamlets. He said that Central Vietnam was best suited for the program but that the concept should not have been applied indiscriminately in all parts of the Delta. In those parts of the Delta where people's homes were widely dispersed, a system of constant small unit patrolling combined with armed local militia was the best answer.
4. Minh stated that it was important to fit the strategic hamlet into an overall concept of pacification, and to understand that pacification, not spectacular combat actions against the VC, was the main mission of

the military forces. He said that the VC were not afraid of spectacular operations involving large units but were afraid of small combat actions and civic action operations which would disrupt and destroy their support organization, both outside and within existing strategic hamlets. The way to break up their organization was to win the support of the population by working with them and gaining their confidence.

5. To carry out pacification successfully, according to Minh, the Army would have to be reorganized on a territorial basis. The existing inverted pyramid of enormous staff organization at corps and division level would have to be reversed and responsibilities decentralized. The corps were staffed by "bureaucrats" not soldiers. He said that units would be assigned to a defined area and given a pacification mission within that area for an extended period of time. Small unit highly mobile operations would be emphasized. He envisaged that there would be greater decentralization of responsibility to subordinate echelons, that they would be given the authority to operate without constant reference to higher headquarters. This would also apply to the province chiefs. If officials at the province and unit level fail to produce results, then they would be replaced, but no longer would they be required to constantly refer to higher echelons or to Saigon.
6. General Minh said that one of the greatest problems the new regime faced was the lack of qualified civil or military personnel to accept responsible positions in the provinces. He said he would prefer to have civilians as district chiefs and province chiefs, if at all possible. In this connection, he wondered what had happened to all the NIA (National Institute of Administration) graduates and where they were. The problem is that they are so understaffed with qualified people. He said he would very much like to have a list of these people and where they were now. He was also interested in special training courses for civilian and military district chiefs.
7. What made the task of picking up and carrying on from the previous government particularly difficult was the widespread corruption existing in the provinces, according to Minh. Practically everybody had been involved, he said. Now the problem was what to do with these people because they were, for the most part, also the only trained administrators and technicians in Vietnam. He indicated that the new government intended to punish the most flagrant cases and transfer others to different provinces. Hereafter, he said, instead of permitting this type of corruption to continue, the first few province chiefs caught stealing would be shot. This might seem a bloody solution, he stated, but it was necessary to make examples. At this point I suggested that if he could make an example of a relative of some high

official in the new government, this would be even more impressive. Minh said that the Americans had no idea how extensive corruption had been under the previous government or the effect it had had on the morale of the population. He said that many province and district chiefs had sold MAP barbed wire to the population who knew very well that the barbed wire had been given free by the U.S. One thing that a lot of people have never realized, he said, is that the average peasant is very intelligent. He knows when he is being robbed, and he knows the difference between good and bad government. The population in the countryside asks very little, only an opportunity to farm their rice fields in peace and that they were very cooperative if treated justly. He cited two particular cases of corruption examples. In the Province of Nhatrang, the old province chief had apparently demanded a substantial pay-off to grant licenses to sell either rice or fish in the province. This had, in effect, created two monopolies. When the old province chief was removed many individuals came to the new one to ask permission to sell their rice. When the new province chief told them that anyone who wanted to sell their products could do so without restriction, people actually broke down and cried. He said the corruption in higher circles of the government had been even worse. For instance, General Don had already been approached by a group of Chinese who wanted his cooperation in continuing to monopolize the Camau charcoal trade. They had offered to give 50,000,000 piastres to the Army and 20,000,000 piastres to General Don. He said that this was typical of the way things had been done under the previous government.

8. Minh said that the only way to correct this kind of abuse was to re-orient officials in the provinces and to carry out not only announced but also surprise inspections. He said that he agreed that it was necessary to get out into the provinces, see what was going on and make on-the-spot corrections. He said he would do this personally. The previous government, he felt, had had little contact with the population. Most officials were constantly looking over their shoulder to Saigon. These attitudes would have to be changed. He again reiterated that he intended to play a leading role in this by making personal inspections in the field. He said that changing the attitudes of most government officials towards the population was perhaps the most important task the government had to accomplish.
9. In the Delta, General Minh stated, the new government's policy would be to help groups such as the Hoa Hao to defend their home areas. This would be a major objective. At the same time, an improved approach to pacification would be tried in other areas. He said that he would select Long An as a model province for the new approach

because it was one of the toughest and was, at the same time, accessible to Saigon. Captain Dao, soon to be promoted to Major, and currently General Le Van Kim's aide, was to be selected as Province Chief. Minh also said that a special effort would be made in the Camau region, utilizing Hoa Hao commands along with mobile regular forces to break up VC support operations. He said that the main support for almost everything the VC did in the Delta came from their Camau base. At the same time they would attempt, he said, to break the back of the charcoal racket. He said influential people had been involved in this since 1954 and were, in effect, on the VC payroll. It would be difficult and complicated because the Chinese were also involved.

10. *Comment:* Nothing in General Minh's personal manner that the writer could notice, has changed since he became the Chief of State. He is as unpretentious and candid as in the past. He obviously has no illusions about the difficulties ahead or that the main task of leadership falls on him. He is still the only top Vietnamese leader, known to the writer, who projects the personal warmth and sympathy required to stir popular enthusiasm in Vietnam. The man has the necessary elements of a popular leader in his character but he will have to be pushed into assuming this role because he is essentially a humble man.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET. Secret. Transmitted to the Department of State under cover of airgram A-350 from Saigon, December 2.

320. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency¹

Saigon, November 19, 1963.

2540. 1. General Don, accompanied by Generals Kim and *Khiem*, stated 19 November that Gen Big Minh had invited General Phoumi pay an incognito and discreet visit to Saigon at end November. Don believes it particularly essential establish good relationships with Laos in order permit a collaborative effort along Lao-Vietnam border against Viet Cong lines of supply and communication. He said that Laotians do not have sufficient force to cover this area themselves and are quite willing and anxious that Vietnamese assist but Vietnamese wish to be correct in clearing any such activity with Laos. Vietnamese would use Special Forces units in civilian clothes as regular army would not handle matter discreetly enough. Don said they had high regard for General Phoumi and look forward to fruitful relationships with him.

2. Following points were made in reply to General Don:

- a. Importance of including Souvanna Phouma in any contacts with Laos. We believe, and General Don agreed, that neutralists and General Phoumi forces working very well together and it important to maintain this close collaboration in interests of free world.
- b. Importance of maintaining some form of balance in Laos rather than taking too vigorous a position, as open conflict invites major DRV participation and although we are working on it, up to now we have not built adequate strength on non-Communist side to withstand an onslaught.
- c. Within these limits we concur with desirability of continuing and stepping up discreetly handled Vietnamese operations in cross border area of same nature we trained for and initiated in 1961 and early 1962, suspended during period immediately after Geneva Accords of 1962 and have endeavored to resume in recent months with first results just coming in.

4. *Comment:* Generals were most confiding and open in expressing their ideas but they anticipate that they will be treated with discretion. Thus request most limited distribution this information and non-exposure

outside American channels in order encourage Generals continue keep open a frank and honest mutual channel of information and suggestion.

5. This message passed to Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins. Suggest addressees pass to local Ambassadors on limited basis.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret; Priority; Eyes Only. The source text is the copy sent by the CIA to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Harriman, Ball, Hilsman, and Hughes; also sent to the Office of the Secretary of Defense eyes only for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, Krulak, and William Bundy; and to the White House eyes only for McGeorge Bundy.

321. Memorandum of Discussion at the Special Meeting on Vietnam¹

Honolulu, November 20, 1963.

Item A 1—Country Team Review of the Situation (Political)

Summary of Discussion

Ambassador Lodge described the outlook for the immediate future of Vietnam as hopeful. The Generals appear to be united and determined to step up the war effort. They profess to be keenly aware that the struggle with the Viet Cong is not only a military problem, but is also political and psychological. They attach great importance to a social and economic program as an aid to winning the war. The Generals believe that:

- (1) The requirements for the population to contribute what amounts to "forced labor" in connection with the construction of strategic hamlets must be drastically reduced, if not totally eliminated.
- (2) The Strategic Hamlet Program has been pushed too rapidly and at too great a cost in human effort. More emphasis must be placed on the sociological aspects of the program. Existing strategic hamlets must be consolidated and improved. Any further wholesale expansion of the program should be deferred.
- (3) Chinese racketeers and extortionists—the so-called "cailles"—must be eliminated.
- (4) The procedure of arbitrary arrests and disregard of habeas corpus must end.
- (5) Major efforts must be made to win over the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects to the side of the government. (Recent reports indicate some initial successes in this direction.)

Resumption of U.S. aid should improve the economic situation. The U.S. should for this first year avoid a situation in which it appears that the Diem regime received more aid than the new government.

As far as political institutions are concerned, the Generals talk of facilitating the growth of political parties and of creating more courts and judges, but much of this seems theoretical. Western-educated urban elements expect progress in political liberalization and perhaps the

Council of Sages² will be able to do something to fulfill this need for political expression.

Ambassador Lodge doubted the wisdom of the U.S. making sweeping demands for democratization or for early elections at this time. He believed that in Vietnam the technique of changing governments by violent means is not yet ready to be displaced in favor of changing governments by election. He emphasized that if we can get through the next six months without a serious falling out among the Generals we will be lucky. However, the leading members of the Generals' group are modern-minded men who are at least aware of conditions in the modern world other than in the strictly military field. They evince a desire to react intelligently to the social, economic and political factors, and their performance to date in this sphere has been good. Americans—whether in government or in the press—should not seek to guide them at every turn nor try to get them to act as though they were made in our image. As long as they follow the course they have set for themselves, we should not push them too hard for several months. Since coming to power, the new leaders of Vietnam have acted with restraint. They have held down on arrests, have been willing to correct errors, and have avoided any wholesale purges throughout the governmental administration. Their handling of press and public relations generally is a great improvement. They are trying to please the public—a rather new departure in Vietnam. Although the question of where the true power and influence lies will not become clear until the pulling and hauling of various personalities has made itself felt, the Generals appear to have really tried to have a big civilian element in the government.

In conclusion, Ambassador Lodge remarked that what we are really trying to do in Vietnam is to win the minds of the people. This includes not only the Generals and people who are currently living under RVN control, but also the Viet Cong. The problem is to convince the young VC soldier that if he continues to fight he will surely be killed, but that if he stops he will find that he and his family have an opportunity for a good life in peace and security. Problem thus is not only military, but economic, social and political as well.

For the first time in years the central government has the enthusiastic support of the urban population. However, in the final analysis the war will be won or lost in the country-side and to date the rural population is still apathetic.

The changed situation requires us to rethink our programs, civil and military. We must see whether and how our programs need changing. For example, with regard to our military programs, the question arises whether—with a real chain of command, an improved fighting spirit, the commitment of troops to fight the VC instead of to static non-military missions—present and proposed force levels are appropriate.

To take another example, in our economic programs aimed at the rural areas, we have developed procedures to deal directly with Province Chiefs. This was done largely because of the lassitude of the central bureaucracy and its apparent lack of interest in what happened in the countryside. Perhaps it is still wise to continue to by-pass Saigon so far as possible, but it would be well to review the question. We may be about to get a “new look” in the Saigon bureaucracy.

Finally, as regards all U.S. programs—military, economic, psychological—we should continue to keep before us the goal of setting dates for phasing out U.S. activities and turning them over to the Vietnamese; and these dates, too, should be looked at again in the light of the new political situation. The date mentioned in the McNamara-Taylor statement of October 2³ on U.S. military withdrawal had—and is still having—a tonic effect. We should set dates for USOM and USIS programs, too. We can always grant last-minute extensions if we think it wise to do so.

Ambassador Lodge said all this is submitted in the belief that an American presence will be wanted—and needed—in Vietnam for some time in the future. But it should perhaps be a different kind of presence from what exists—and is needed—in Vietnam today.

Secretary Rusk asked whether we could expect to encourage the new government to move closer toward a true democracy without thereby reducing the main effort against the VC. Ambassador Lodge replied that as an example forced labor could be reduced although not entirely. He went on to say that while we can expect some progress toward democratic processes at the local village and hamlet level it is hard for him to imagine a sophisticated Western democracy emerging in Vietnam for some time to come.

Secretary Rusk asked if there was any way the U.S. could hope to prevent a future internal split between the Generals. Ambassador Lodge replied that this can best be accomplished by making sure that they understand what the U.S. considers would be best for their country. He noted that the Generals recognized the advantages of sticking together.

In addition to other actions, the Ambassador said if we make it clear, for example, that we have confidence in General Minh it will materially help his position among his colleagues and probably will serve to retain him in his present position of authority. From his own conversation with Generals Minh, Don, and Kim, Ambassador Lodge is confident that they want to avoid any internal disputes among the members of the Military Revolutionary Council. These three key Generals believe that they can keep General Dinh under control. However, Ambassador Lodge is not too sure this is the case, as General Dinh, in addition to being Minister of Security, also commands the troops of III Corps.

General Taylor asked what were the present intentions of the military leaders with respect to the ultimate shape of the government. Ambassador Lodge replied that he believes that General Minh is sincere when he says that the Military Revolutionary Council is merely a provisional government. However, there is no political leadership emerging from the scene thus far and he doubts that it will come from any of the civilians who are now in the Cabinet. Ambassador Lodge re-emphasized his earlier recommendation that the U.S. not press the Generals too hard on political reforms and early elections. He would instead urge that the U.S. be patient and give the Generals a chance to get on with the war. Ambassador Lodge believes that they are sincere, that they have the good of their country at heart, and that they have a basically sound program.

Item A 2—Review of Situation (Military)

Summary of Discussion

General Harkins began by pointing out that despite what has appeared in the press, there is no difference of opinion between Ambassador Lodge and himself on the situation in Vietnam or on the conduct of the war against the VC. Ambassador Lodge expressed his complete agreement.

Turning to the military situation in Vietnam, General Harkins emphasized that the problem is one of people, not statistics. The problem is to win the people over to the full support of the war effort. Until the new government gets out in the field and talks to the people and hears their problems and true feelings, they can never hope to really win the war.

As for the statistics, after the coup VC incidents shot up to 300-400% of what they were before. However, after 6 November they dropped down

to normal and have remained that way ever since. Similarly, the numbers of returnees under the Chieu Hoi program fell off markedly since early October. However, just this past week over 350 members of the Hoa Hao Sect have rallied to the government, as have a number of Cao Dais. At the same time, the Montagnard tribes are continuing to come out of the hills to seek the protection of the government. (About 220,000 had rallied to the government before the coup as a result of such programs as the CIDG. At present a total of about 400,000 Montagnards are under RVN control.)

The change of government has had a definite impact at the province level, where everything focuses on the Province Chief. These 42 key individuals have the real job of winning the people over to the support of the government. Perhaps even more important than the Province Chief is the District Chief, of whom there are over 253 throughout the country. As these officials are definitely associated with the old government insofar as the villager is concerned, we must expect that the new regime will probably want to reassign nearly all of them to emphasize the complete break with past policy.

As to the situation within the officer ranks generally, there is still much to be done. There remain a lot of deserving officers who should be promoted. General Minh is well aware of this point. The role of Generals Khanh and Tri in the II and I Corps, respectively, is still not clear although they have associated themselves with the objectives of the coup. General Minh intends to establish a more direct chain of command and insure that military orders will be carried out when received. This will be quite a change for the good as in the past a military order was seldom implemented until the responsible commander had checked it out through political channels back to the Palace.

The principal problems the new government faces are: first, the appointment of new Province and District Chiefs will inevitably complicate matters until these new officials are able to become acquainted with their areas of responsibility and get on top of the local situation; second, the establishment of a straightforward military chain of command will, of course, involve some high level negotiations among the Generals themselves; third, the people in the rural areas still remain apathetic to the government; fourth, the support of the man in the village and hamlet will depend on whether the government can assure him security and do something to improve his current marginal existence.

Secretary Rusk asked how Province and District Chiefs were selected—were they natives of the area to which they were assigned? General Harkins stated that the selection of these key officials was done by Generals Minh and Don in consultation with the Corps Commander concerned. He emphasized that those Province Chiefs who were being relieved would not be wasted; they would be reassigned to other positions where they could make use of their experience.

General Harkins emphasized again that we must expect that it will take a little time for things to settle down again after this change of administration. The new government is discovering a lot of things that it did not know. For example, some 50 tons of ammunition were found stored in the Presidential Guard barracks. Another problem the new government is considering, for example, is what to do with the gendarmerie. The question arises as to whether it is better to have these outstanding NCOs engaged in police functions primarily within the Capitol area, or whether they could better serve the nation by being reintegrated into the Army and sent out to fight the VC.

[Here follows a description of a slide show given by Harkins.]

Item A 3—Review of Situation (Economic)

Summary of Discussion

Mr. Brent took the lead on this item, noting the difficulties experienced with the Diem regime in its latter days and pointing out the opportunity which now existed for more effective collaboration between the U.S. and RVN under the new regime. The Generals are seeking means to improve government administration, to get the most out of U.S. aid, and to win the war as soon as possible.

Initial U.S. efforts in the economic field are directed toward encouraging the RVN to establish a central ministry for economic policy and planning, including all aspects of foreign aid. This idea has been well received by the Prime Minister and working level officials. The fact that the Prime Minister has already assumed direct responsibility for supervision of the Ministry of Finance and National Economy is a first step in this direction. The Prime Minister is well informed on the economic problems of his country. In an informal session with him on 7 November 1963, agreement in principle was reached on the following points, details to be worked out as circumstances permit:

- a. All economic aid matters will be handled through the Prime Minister's office.
- b. All strategic hamlet matters will be handled through the Prime Minister's office.
- c. A mixed U.S.-Vietnamese group can be established to study the economic situation, isolate problems, and recommend solutions. The RVN team would include Dean Thuc; the Minister of Rural Affairs, Mr. Quang; and the Director General of Planning, Mr. Diem.
- d. Budget matters, except military, will also be under control of the Prime Minister.

Areas of priority attention would be taxation; exploitation of farmers, fishermen, and small artisans by middlemen; inefficient government procedures; use of foreign aid; joint U.S.-RVN budgeting; and marketing policies for rice, fish, and fertilizer.

The total requirements for U.S. aid remain large. Defense expenditures (including MAP) equal nearly 1/4 of the country's national income and substantially exceed the entire fiscal revenue of the central government. The Country Team recognizes the limitations on foreign aid funds imposed by Congress, but recommends maintenance of the FY 63 level in FY 64 and 65. Beside the economic rationale, it appears politically and psychologically necessary to extend at least the same measure of support to the new regime as was extended to Diem.

Upon U.S. recognition of the new RVN on 8 November, a commercial import and PL 480, Title I program were resumed to cover urgently required materials and items. An amendment to the PL 480, Title I program was negotiated to provide 4.3 million dollars worth of wheat flour and sweetened condensed milk.

Since the pipeline for essential commodities is refilled, our present posture is to carefully review specific requests of the RVN. Our intention is to maintain leverage and avoid the impression of giving a blank check. We are hopeful that a few months experience will allow negotiation of a more substantial installment of aid in return for RVN cooperation along lines desired by the U.S.

Two additional facts of the commercial import program should be mentioned. First, it was undoubtedly the realization that the U.S. could not be bluffed into restoring import financing that finally provided the spark that set off the coup. Second, there is no indication that the Vietnamese economy was harmed by the suspension in any fundamental

respect. Prices of indigenously produced commodities pursued the usual seasonal patterns and price increases in imported commodities were anticipated with the notable exception of condensed milk and flour. Local production apparently was not seriously affected.

On the social side there are a number of encouraging signs. The new Minister of Security and the new Chief of Police both recognize that there must be an end to fear and hatred of the government. The police must be restrained and re-educated. This same concern for popular feeling has also been expressed by the new Minister of Information, the new Minister of Education, and by the new Minister of Labor. During Mr. Brent's calls upon six of the new Ministers, all have been unanimous in expressing their beliefs that the future of Vietnam must be determined by the people of Vietnam themselves.

As for the students and the Buddhists, both groups feel that as originators of events that led to the coup, they deserve special treatment. The Buddhist associations are being listened to by the new government and are exerting a calming influence. The students on the other hand, except in Hue, are demanding dismissals of governmental and educational officials and a number of other changes. They are organizing into associations with definite political objectives and may continue to be a problem. The new government hopes that they can be developed as a constructive force. In this connection, General Minh is working with a group of students for the establishment of a Vietnamese Peace Corps so that the younger generation can channel their energies into worthwhile civic action type activities.

Mr. Brent concluded that there is an entirely new spirit in Vietnam; that the new government is confident, but not overconfident; that it is warmly disposed toward the U.S., and, that we have opportunities to exploit that we never had before. The Vietnamese are soberly aware that if this present experiment fails there will probably be no second chance.

Secretary Rusk asked if the former Secretary of State at the Presidency, Mr. Thuan, was usable in the new government. Ambassador Lodge stated that Thuan would probably prefer some post outside of the country, and that Generals Minh and Don may well use him later as an Ambassador.

Secretary Rusk then asked to what extent the U.S. officials shared offices with Vietnamese compatriots. Mr. Brent replied that at the province level they do, but very little at the government level. Secretary Rusk stated that this might be desirable if the Vietnamese would agree.

Mr. William P. Bundy asked if the RVN had purchased milk and flour from France following the suspension of the CIP. Mr. Brent replied they had since U.S. supplies were not available for delivery in time to meet the government's requirements and since France was prepared to divert a ship for the purpose. However, after conversations with the Prime Minister, the RVN agreed to reduce these orders by 50% since the U.S. can now supply these commodities on the desired schedule. Secretary McNamara then inquired as to the estimated size of the rice crop, to which Mr. Brent replied that they hope to have a 300,000 ton export this year, and that due to improved seed and fertilizer it could be approximately 30% more by next year. Secretary McNamara said it would be worth considering the diversion of a substantial amount of U.S. aid to provide more fertilizer and thereby increase rice production. For a relatively small dollar outlay for fertilizer we could raise the RVN's income from its rice exports appreciably. As it will probably not be possible for the new government to raise taxes, the only solution to its economic problem is to increase its exports. This means an increased requirement for fertilizer and seed. He asked the Group 1 subcommittee⁴ to look into this further. Mr. Bell then asked if the new government would have to relax economic controls, or if it could take steps to raise additional taxes or to improve tax collection. Ambassador Lodge replied that it was too early to give an answer to this and Minister Trueheart added that while the RVN can improve tax collection, it would not be feasible to increase direct taxes on items in heavy demand such as milk, for example. Admiral Felt stated that there were some cases where the people were subjected to double taxation by both the government and the VC. Perhaps as the areas of VC control were reduced, the government might be able to increase its tax collections. Secretary McNamara said that we must be realistic. The new government cannot be expected to establish a standard of austerity too soon, nor can it count on much increased revenue from improved tax collection procedures. The only solution seems to be greater emphasis on increasing productivity in the export sector of the economy.

[Here follows discussion of agenda item A4, "Review of the Situation (Province Summaries)," given by Harkins. Harkins stated that while the Country Team considered all provinces critical, they singled out 13 which were "particularly critical because of their current problems." Those provinces were Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phuoc Thanh, Binh Duong, Tay Ninh, Hau Nghia, Long An, Kien Tuong, Dinh Tuong, Kien Hoa, Chnong Thien, and An Xuyen. The state of this last province on the Ca Mau peninsula occasioned the more general discussion printed below.]

An Xuyen, on the extreme tip of the Ca Mau peninsula is safe in the cities, but the VC really own the province. They have been in control since the early forties. There is considerable production of rice and of charcoal, amounting to some \$10 million a year. Much of this revenue is siphoned off by the VC. Some of the produce goes to Thailand and some to Singapore as well as to Saigon. MACV is investigating the feasibility of a combined naval-economic blockade to cut off the flow of revenue to the VC.

General Harkins emphasized the need for the RVN to get trained intelligence personnel into the strategic hamlets to identify the VC and keep them from forming Communist cells. Security of the informer is the key to the problem. Thus far there have not been sufficient military forces at the village level to make it safe for people to report on the VC. Secretary McNamara asked if the reason that so many strategic hamlets were not considered successful in the Delta was for security, economic, or political reasons, or all three. Mr. Fraleigh stated that they were unsuccessful in all three. However, in the northern areas of Vietnam 60% of the hamlets were considered successful.

Secretary McNamara said that he believed there were three things to do in the Delta: first, get the Chieu Hoi Program moving; second, get the fertilizer program going to increase output of rice; and third, and most important, improve the security of the strategic hamlets by arming the trained militia and increasing the number of militia.

General Harkins added that the leaders of the new government must get out of Saigon and talk to the people in the Delta area.

General Taylor remarked that this discussion points up the fact that the war is different in each province. Perhaps we need joint U.S.-Vietnam province teams to attack the problem at the province level. He asked if the criticality of the thirteen provinces was based purely on military assessment. General Harkins said it was not; that it was across the board.

Ambassador Lodge then gave a political summary of the current situation throughout the provinces making the following points:

- a. Most of the population is aware of the coup.
- b. Most of the population is reserved in their opinion of the coup and are waiting to see what effects it will have on their daily lives.
- c. Major programs are now stalled at the province level awaiting instructions from the central government.

- d. Numerous changes and impending changes of province chiefs have contributed to the uncertainty and inactivity at the province level.
- e. The death of Diem is regretted; the death of Nhu is not.
- f. Public opinion concerning U.S. involvement in the coup is mixed. Cooperation between RVN and U.S. personnel is closer than ever before.

Item B 1—Prospects and measures proposed by Country Team for improved prosecution of the war under the new government (Political, including possibility of improved relations with neighboring States)

[Here follows discussion of Vietnam's relations with Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and France which developed into a general discussion of the situation in Cambodia.]

Item B 2—Prospects and measures proposed by Country Team for improved prosecution of the war under the new government (Military, including a report on progress in accomplishment of tasks assigned as a result of the McNamara-Taylor Mission, and outlining plans for control of infiltration and special requirements for the Delta Campaign)

[Here follows Harkins' presentation, including slides, of the actions that the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces were taking to increase pressure on the Viet Cong. This presentation led to a more general discussion printed below.]

Secretary McNamara stated he assumed that the first effort would be made to protect the hamlets that have already been built. General Harkins said the whole Strategic Hamlet Program was under intensive review. Secretary McNamara asked how long this would take. Minister Trueheart estimated that it would be two to three months before the revised program could get under way. General Taylor recommended that any new plans that are prepared should establish firm target dates for various phases, so that tangible check points on RVN progress would be available.

Item B 3—Prospects and measures proposed by Country Team for improved prosecution of the war under the new government (Economic)

Summary of Discussion

Mr. Silver reviewed the economic situation in South Vietnam noting that the RVN expenditures have risen about 60% in the period 1960-1964

while U.S. aid, which amounts to about 40% of the central government's revenue, has declined somewhat. This increase in expenditures is nearly entirely attributable to an increase in defense expenditures, a 100% increase from 1960 to 1964. In addition, the increase for civil expenditures included non-military costs for counterinsurgency, and as a major item, support for the strategic hamlet program.

Turning to the 1964 budget, the Diem government estimated the total budget deficit in 1964 at approximately 9.0 billion plasters. After adjustments to his figures, USOM believes that the deficit will more likely be in the order of 7.0 billion plasters. This 7.0 billion plasters represent about one third of the total money supply; about 8% of the GNP; and an equivalent deficit in the U.S. budget of close to \$50.0 billion.

South Vietnam is primarily agricultural, with a small industrial base. This is significant since the economy does not have the capacity to expand and meet the increasing demand for goods. Although prices have not gone up appreciably despite increased defense expenditures during the past years, it is not believed this situation will continue through 1964 unless the projected deficit is neutralized.

A previous backlog of U.S. economic aid and a pump-priming operation to get the strategic hamlet program started has had the effect of reducing central government expenditures in the past. In addition, the RVN has reduced its foreign exchange holdings from about \$200.0 million in 1961 to about \$155.0 million in 1962. Fortunately, these holdings have been rising in recent months because of stepped-up rice exports.

USOM's proposal is that U.S. and RVN personnel should sit down together and discuss these problems with a view toward developing agreed joint solutions. In general, USOM's recommendations would be to improve the efficiency of tax collections, increase taxes on selected items (e.g., gasoline), reduce the civil budget by 1.0 billion plasters, maintain the 1964 military expenditures at the 1963 level if this is consistent with the war effort, and introduce attractive savings programs, including increased use of the national lottery, rural banks, war bonds, etc. Also, USOM believes that the economy can stand an increase in money supply of 1.0 to 1.5 billion plasters without serious effects.

All of this leaves the RVN about 2.0 billion plasters short in their budget. USOM would recommend that this be met by drawing down on their

foreign exchange reserves which amount to about \$170.0 million at present.

Secretary Rusk then asked for comments on the export/import status. Mr. Silver said that in 1960 the foreign exchange earnings were \$88.0 million. In 1961 it dropped to \$70.0 million due to a drop in price of rice and rubber on the world market. In 1962 earnings dropped further to \$47.0 million due to floods which wiped out the usual rice exports. The estimate for this year comes to about \$80.0 million with the projection for 1965 hopefully at \$95.0 million. Present imports are about \$250.0 million. This figure does not include MAP or strategic hamlet inputs, but does include CIP. In response to a question from Mr. Bell, Mr. Silver pointed out that this analysis only relates to government and not to the private sector.

Mr. William P. Bundy asked why a 2.0 billion plaster deficit in 1964 was considered important when there had been 3.0 to 4.0 billion plaster deficits in 1962 and 1963. Mr. Silver replied that prices have risen 15% in the last three years and this, plus cumulative deficits of this magnitude could well become serious.

Secretary McNamara stated that one of the charts showed a 20% increase in the money supply during the first part of this year and asked how this was to be absorbed. Mr. Silver said apparently much of this money was cash hoardings. There were also reports that quantities of cash were being held by the VC as a precaution against the day when the strategic hamlet program would cut them off from their current sources of revenue from the countryside.

Secretary McNamara expressed concern that this huge increase in money supply in combination with a deficit of 7.0 billion plasters could lead to price increases which in turn could create such serious political problems that the present government might not be able to survive. It will be hard enough for the new government to consolidate its position as it is. It is absolutely essential that we help it maintain economic stability over the next 12 to 18 months. Under the best of circumstances the hoped for transfer of power from the military to some form of civilian government will be a very difficult political operation. Under conditions of economic instability it will be almost impossible.

Secretary McNamara stated he was of the opinion the U.S. should lean over backwards to help the Generals avoid economic unrest. With a tremendous deficit lying ahead, this is going to be very difficult. The

United States should not try to push this new government too far to raise taxes, tighten up administration, reduce budgets, and so forth. Economic stability is really the foundation of military security in the long run. He would be prepared, therefore, to take a calculated risk and cut some of our safety factors on the military side if this were necessary to insure economic stability.

Mr. Bell agreed that the RVN was facing a very difficult and dangerous economic situation which could be extremely serious to the whole war effort. Our first objective should be to get together with the Vietnamese to be sure we understand one another. Toward this end, plans are being made to send out a prominent figure in the economic field as head of a U.S. economic mission which would tackle these problems jointly with the best Vietnamese economists. This is clearly what must be undertaken in the next couple of months.

Mr. Janow then commented further on the import level. He said that in 1962 imports were about \$280 million. This year the estimate (including our aid) is about \$238 million and for 1964 the planning figure is about \$255 million. If this commercial import level is compared with their exports of about \$100 million, there is a gap of about \$150 million. This deficit does not include such costs as MAP, the counter-insurgency program which the US is supporting, or capital investment. If these are added the figure is increased by another \$250 million. A gap of this kind, built into the RVN economy is obviously against their best interest.

Major General Timmes then spoke about the military budget. Using charts he showed that the RVN regular forces would require about 11.2 billion plasters. 75% of this would go to military pay, allowance, and subsistence. General Timmes emphasized that this is the Vietnam plaster budget. The MAP budget amounts to about \$175 million. He then showed a comparison of this year and last year's RVN military budget. This showed that the current budget is only 358 million plasters larger than last year's and the forces are much larger. MAAG believes that this budget has been reduced to the minimum figure.

General Timmes showed the figures for the Civil Guard and SDC. He pointed out that 86% of the Civil Guard and 95% of the Self Defense Force budgets were for pay and allowances. His final chart showed how the total defense cost of 14.5 billion plasters for CY 64 was made up. He noted that perhaps this figure could be reduced by 100 to 200 million plasters as a result of force reorganizations which might take place under the new government.

Secretary McNamara pointed out that the difference between these figures and Mr. Silver's program came to 750 million dollars. Secretary Rusk then asked how much of a limiting factor was money as far as finishing the war at an early date. Secretary McNamara said that in his opinion the RVN is going to be right on the ragged edge of running out of the money needed to win the war. The situation in the Delta and strategic hamlet program itself are both serious, immediate problems. Furthermore, we must improve the output of the country. This means more fertilizers, additional expenditures to raise the economic base and increase productivity. He stated that all this requires money. The RVN has this tremendous deficit; the new government is sitting on top of a keg of political dynamite. Secretary McNamara doubts that enough money has been budgeted under AID and MAP to handle the situation. This is very serious problem which must be watched extremely carefully.

Mr. Bell shared Secretary McNamara's concern. More money may be required to finance what ought to be the heaviest action year of the war. If things move successfully, it might be possible to taper off after the next 12 to 15 months. However, we must be careful not to give the RVN any more of a "fiscal hangover" from the war than necessary. He agreed with Secretary McNamara that it is a serious problem which could blow up on us if we are not careful in the next six months. But, we must also keep the RVN's feet to the fire, keep their resources fully committed, and not let them saddle themselves with an economy and military establishment that is larger than circumstances require.

Mr. Fraleigh then discussed the advantages of increased use of fertilizer on rice production. Vietnam uses very little fertilizer on rice as compared to other countries. As a result, its per hectare yield of rice is 1/2 that of Taiwan or Japan. Mr. Fraleigh recommends that we think in terms of doubling the use of fertilizer in 1964. For every \$70 spent on a ton of fertilizer delivered in Vietnam, \$110 worth of additional milled rice is produced for export. Mr. Bell wondered what was holding it back. Mr. Fraleigh replied it was the credit system, since fertilizer is handled commercially. Secretary McNamara observed that unless an adequate credit system is devised to improve the distribution of fertilizer, the productivity will not rise and this productivity is needed to build political stability. Ambassador Lodge remarked that South Vietnam could be one of the richest rice producing areas of the world.

Secretary McNamara said he was afraid a certain euphoria had settled over us since the coup. True, the Generals are friendly to us, but the situation in Cambodia is deteriorating and the VC showed they have a

tremendous reserve capability by trebling their rate of incidents week before last. He wondered if current U.S. programs put enough power behind our objectives.

Secretary Rusk noted that the Japanese might be able to work something out with the RVN on a rice-fertilizer barter basis. This would be a matter that could be explored during his forthcoming trip.

Secretary McNamara summarized the present situation as follows. South Vietnam is under tremendous pressure from the VC. The VC are as numerous today as they were a year or two years ago. The surrounding area is weaker. The Cambodian situation is potentially very serious to the RVN. The input of arms from Cambodia before the recent developments was very worrisome in the Delta. The Generals head a very fragile government. The United States should not try to cut the corners too fine. We must be prepared to devote enough resources to this job of winning the war to be certain of accomplishing it instead of just hoping to accomplish it.

Decisions Made and Actions To Be Taken

Exploratory discussions would be held with the Japanese government to determine if a mutually advantageous rice-fertilizer barter arrangement could be worked out between Japan and the RVN. (Action: State.)

Item B 4—Prospects and measures proposed by Country Team for improved prosecution of the war under the new government (Strategic Hamlet Program)

Summary of Discussion

Minister Trueheart led the discussion. He stated that the Strategic Hamlet Program is sound. It separates the VC from supplies, intelligence information, and from the general population. In the longer term, the program holds out prospects for social and economic changes throughout the country.

However, under the Diem regime implementation of the program has been faulty, particularly in the Delta region, primarily due to over-extension. The Strategic Hamlet Program represents a large dollar investment by the U.S. Government and a large labor investment by the Vietnamese people. Minister Trueheart believes the new government in RVN will continue the program since they cannot default on what was

promised the people under this program by their predecessors. The Generals will seek to disassociate themselves from past errors by providing for closer military and civil cooperation, reduced forced labor, relocation of poorly placed hamlets and improved training and arming of the militia. Most importantly, they must, sooner or later, establish meaningful priorities. Primary emphasis on hamlets must be in the Delta area and progress reporting should focus on this strategic region as well as on the thirteen critical provinces discussed earlier by General Harkins.

In the future additional hamlets will be required, maybe as many as one thousand, and some poor hamlets will need relocation. This will be expensive. Seventy percent of the hamlets in the Delta are not up to the standard required to make them truly effective. Economic and political progress must be made to improve the people's standard of living. New educational facilities are required and distribution of fertilizer to the inhabitants of the strategic hamlets is needed. The new government has established an inter-ministerial committee to supervise the Strategic Hamlet Program. Minister Trueheart stated that as far as the Country Team could determine, the one billion plasters already budgeted by the RVN for support of strategic hamlets will cover current costs. No additional MAP funds are foreseen.

Secretary Rusk asked how much medical contact did the people in the hamlets have? He was answered that this varies, USOM has one group that dispenses some medical assistance and the U.S. Army has an on-the-job medical training program. General Harkins added that there are only 700 doctors in RVN, 450 of whom are in the armed forces.

Mr. McGeorge Bundy asked where does the responsibility for the Strategic Hamlet Program now fall? Minister Trueheart replied that there was no change on the U.S. side, and that the inter-ministerial committee is responsible on the RVN side. Mr. Bundy then asked how do we communicate our recommendations concerning this program to RVN now that Mr. Nhu is dead. Minister Trueheart replied that we utilize all available means of communication through MAAG, USOM, MACV, etc.

Admiral Felt stated we are dealing with development of a new campaign plan with priority emphasized on areas south and southwest of Saigon. General Harkins replied the first priority of effort would be in this part of the country although attention would also be given to the problem areas in the north.

Mr. McGeorge Bundy then asked to whom the province chiefs report. Minister Trueheart replied that this varies between Corps, but in most cases to Corps Commanders. Admiral Felt then asked if this put the division commanders on the same level as the province chiefs. Mr. Colby replied in the affirmative, but noted that the division is an operational command subject to movement to any part of the country.

Mr. McGeorge Bundy asked how the strategic hamlets are financed. Minister Trueheart replied that they were originally financed through an emergency purchase of ten million dollars worth of plasters by the U.S. Government. Now they are being financed by the Vietnamese Government, although some \$35 million of U.S. assistance has gone into the hamlet program this year. Minister Trueheart stated that there is an advantage to the village inhabitants contributing reasonable amounts of labor to the hamlets as it serves thereby to identify the peasants with their own hamlets and with the program as a whole.

Minister Trueheart emphasized that when he said 70% of the hamlets in the Delta were not considered up to standard, he did not mean that they are under VC control. General Taylor asked if there are any hamlets under control of the VC. General Harkins responded that although some hamlets have been over-run and some subverted by the VC, he did not know of any that were actually under the control of the VC.

[Here follows discussion of Item C 1, "Revision of Military Comprehensive Plan;" Item C 2, "Status Report on FY 64 MAP;" Item D, "Outline in terms of forces, timing and numbers involved, the projected program for reduction U.S. military forces by end FY65;" and Item E, "Country Team suggestions for revision of current reports to develop a consolidated country team reporting system."]

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 334, MAC/VM Files: FRC 69 A 702, 204-58 Policy and Precedent Files (1963). Secret. No drafting information appears on the source text. An attached copy of the press release describing the work of the conference is not printed.

Felt sent this summary of the discussion at Honolulu to McNamara under cover of a memorandum of November 22. The agenda for the meeting is not printed. Items E and G. of the agenda, "CIA-MACV Relations" and "Review of Special Funding", did not have memoranda of discussion. On November 19, Rusk and McNamara agreed to address

certain items on the agenda in subcommittees which met on the morning of November 20 and then reported to the principal participants in the afternoon. Another copy of this memorandum is *ibid.*, RG 84, Saigon Embassy Files: FRC 67 A 677, 350. Honolulu Conference.

In a November 13 memorandum, Forrestal briefed McGeorge Bundy on this meeting. The memorandum reads in part as follows:

“From what I can gather the Honolulu Meeting is shaping up into a replica of its predecessors, i.e., an eight-hour briefing conducted in the usual military manner. In the past this has meant about 100 people in the CINCPAC Conference Room, who are treated to a dazzling display of maps and charts, punctuated with some impressive intellectual fireworks from Bob McNamara.” (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Honolulu Meeting, Briefing Book, 11/20/63 A)

² According to telegram 1092 from Saigon, November 20, the Council of Sages was formally established by the Provisional Government as a smaller Council of Notables, still intended to be advisory and broadly representative of Vietnamese society. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET)

³ Document 167.

⁴ Group 1 was the subcommittee dealing with economic problems. It included as members Janow, Brent, Trueheart, Forrestal, Stoneman, William Bundy, Major General Timmes, Silver, and others.

322. Memorandum for the Record of Discussion at the Daily White House Staff Meeting¹

Washington, November 22, 1963, 8 a.m.

1. Mr. Bundy presided throughout the meeting.
2. Honolulu. Mr. Bundy opened the meeting, commenting that he was very impressed with the idea of traveling by jet to distant places and holding a conference.² The fact that he was able to get a good night's sleep before arriving in Honolulu and that the whole trip was so effortless and comfortable made a deep impression on him.

Bundy commented that his overall impressions of the conference itself were diffuse, and that this was probably significant. He then went on to make a few specific points. There is no country team in Vietnam at the present time in any real sense. It is clear that Harkins feels he does not have the Ambassador's confidence, and this is affecting US operations in the country. Lodge is clearly the dominant personality, but it is not at all evident that he can handle the job he is now faced with. He is a strong-willed close operator who keeps only his personal staff involved. This was just the type needed during his first months in Saigon when he was supposed to create a posture which would indicate to any would-be revolutionist that the US would not automatically side with Diem.

Now, however, what is needed is a good manager, who can develop a team to do a very complex job. Lodge apparently has neither the inclination for nor the interest in this type of management task. In short, the course the US country team will chart in Vietnam is by no means decided upon. As for the military side Bundy made a passing reference to General Harkins' somewhat shaky performance, and then passed on to say that it was undoubtedly difficult for him to operate under Lodge, particularly after Nolting from whom there was normally complete backing. Now Lodge represents an independent source of power that can not be relied upon to move always in the direction General Harkins might wish.

As to the meetings, Bundy said that briefings of McNamara tend to be sessions where people try to fool him, and he tries to convince them they cannot. As for the military reporting, someone told Bundy that for the first time it was realistic about the situation in the Delta. It was

uncertain whether the change resulted from the fact that US military now believed they could criticize the Vietnam war effort without fear of criticizing the government itself, or whether it was something more fundamental.

Bundy was impressed with the argument by an AID man that fertilizer could be a big help in winning the war in the Delta. He said that everyone recognized that the strategic hamlets, even though associated with Nhu, had to remain the center of the war effort.

Turning to the regime itself Bundy said it was too early to see what course it would follow, but it was clear that the coalition of generals might not last. The regime was concentrating on continuing the war and, more important, seems determined to focus on the war in the Delta, thus hitting at the Viet Cong resource base.

[Here follows discussion of matters unrelated to Vietnam.]

¹ Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-646-71. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by W. Y. Smith.

² See [Document 321](#).

V. The Johnson Presidency, November 22-December 31, 1963:
Lodge-Johnson Meeting on Vietnam, NSAM 273, McNamara Visit,
Year-end Observations

[323. Editorial Note](#)

[324. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense \(McNamara\) to President Johnson](#)

Washington, November 23, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File,
Vietnam Cables. Secret.

[325. Situation Report Prepared in the Department of State for President Johnson](#)

Washington, November 23, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country File,
Memos and Misc. Confidential. Transmitted to the President under cover
of an undated memorandum from Rusk.

[326. Briefing Paper Prepared in the Department of State for President Johnson](#)

Washington, November 23, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country File,
Memos and Misc., 11/63-12/63. Secret. Transmitted to the President under
cover of an undated memorandum from Rusk.

327. Memorandum of Conversation Between the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) and the Ambassador to Vietnam (Lodge)

Washington, November 24, 1963, 10 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Secret Limit Distribution. Drafted and initialed by Hilsman. Approved in FE on November 29. Lodge traveled to Washington after the Honolulu Conference. A typewritten note on the source text reads: "No additional distribution without authorization from FE>/MT. Hilsman."

328. Memorandum of a Conversation Between the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) and the Ambassador to Vietnam (Lodge)

Washington, November 24, 1963, 10 a.m.

Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted and initialed by Hilsman.

329. Memorandum of Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and the Ambassador to Vietnam (Lodge)

Washington, November 24, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Vietnam Cables. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by Harriman on December 7.

330. Memorandum for the Record of Meeting

Washington, November 24, 1963, 3 p.m.

Source: Johnson Library, Meeting Notes File, Meeting with Lodge and Vietnam Advisers. Secret. Drafted by McCone on November 25. The

meeting was held in the Executive Office Building. Johnson describes this meeting in *The Vantage Point*, pp. 43-44.

331. National Security Action Memorandum No. 273

Washington, November 26, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, NSAM's. Top Secret. NSAM 273 grew out of the discussion at the November 20 Honolulu Conference. McGeorge Bundy wrote the first draft and sent copies to Hilsman and William Bundy, asking for their opinions. In fact, Bundy's draft was almost identical to the final paper. The major exception was paragraph 7 of the Bundy draft which reads as follows: "7. With respect to action against North Vietnam, there should be a detailed plan for the development of additional Government of Vietnam resources, especially for sea-going activity, and such planning should indicate the time and investment necessary to achieve a wholly new level of effectiveness in this field of action. (Action: DOD and CIA)" (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous) Bundy thought that President Kennedy and Lodge might want to discuss this paper during their planned meeting on November 24. Hilsman responded on November 23 in a memorandum to McGeorge Bundy that he thought the draft was "fine" and he had made only minor changes. No record of Hilsman's changes have been found. (Ibid., Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam) Hilsman also sent a copy to Rusk under cover of a memorandum of November 23 and suggested the Secretary might find it of use at the Cabinet meeting scheduled for that afternoon. (Department of State, Cabinet Meeting Files: Lot 68 D 350) At the November 23 Cabinet meeting, Vietnam was not discussed.

332. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, November 27, 1963—8:40 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 29. Secret. Drafted by Mendenhall and cleared by Hilsman. Repeated to Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Vientiane, London, Paris, and CINCPAC for POLAD.

333. Memorandum Prepared for the Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, November 29, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, POL 26 Rebellion, Coups, Insurgency. Secret; No Foreign Dissem. McCone sent this memorandum to Rusk under cover of a December 2 memorandum, which reads as follows: "You will recall at our recent meeting in Honolulu spokesmen from Saigon mentioned that the Viet Cong were engaged in such activities as defended hamlets, school and medical programs, etc. "In view of the above the attached memorandum representing the views of the CIA staff on these activities may be of particular interest to you." For the discussion at the Honolulu meeting, see Document 321.

334. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, November 30, 1963, 4 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution. Repeated to Phnom Penh, Vientiane, Bangkok, and CINCPAC.

335. Central Intelligence Agency Information Report

Washington, December 2, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Vietnam Memos. Secret; Routine; No Foreign Dissem/No Dissem Abroad/Controlled Dissem Background Use Only. A note on the source text indicates this information was acquired in Saigon on and before November 30; as it was commentary, it was unappraised. Also published in Declassified Documents, 1975, 56 E.

[336. Memorandum From President Johnson to the Secretary of State](#)

Washington, December 2, 1963.

Source: Department of State, S/S-NSC Files: Lot 72 D 316, NSAMs. Secret.

[337. Memorandum From President Johnson to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff \(Taylor\)](#)

Washington, December 2, 1963.

Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 69 A 3131, Vietnam 210. Secret.

[338. Letter From M. Lyall Breckon of the Vietnam Working Group to the First Secretary of the Embassy in Vietnam \(Miller\)](#)

Washington, December 2, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, POL 27 Coups, Rebellion, Insurgency. Secret; Official-Informal.

[339. Editorial Note](#)

[340. Telegram From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Commander in Chief, Pacific \(Felt\)](#)

Washington, December 2, 1963—4:48 p.m.

Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 71 A 6489, Viet Sensitive. Top Secret. Drafted by Krulak. Repeated for information to Harkins.

341. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, December 3, 1963, 11 a.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27-13 CAMB. Secret; Immediate; Limit Distribution. Repeated to Bangkok, London, Paris, Vientiane, Ottawa, Phnom Penh, New Delhi, Moscow, and CINCPAC. Passed to the White House.

342. Letter From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman)

Saigon, December 3, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 72 D 219, TIGER Basic File. Secret; Eyes Only.

343. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)

Saigon, December 4, 1963, 11 a.m.

Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 71 A 6489, Viet Sensitive. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Also sent to CINCPAC eyes only for Felt.

344. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, December 4, 1963, 2 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27-13 CAMB. Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution.

345. Telegram From the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Felt) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Honolulu, December 4, 1963, 7 p.m.

Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 71-A-6489, Viet Sensitive. Top Secret; Routine. Repeated for information to the White House eyes only for Bundy; to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman; and to the CIA for McCone and Helms. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET, and Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Vietnam Cables) Also published in Declassified Documents, 1976, 250D.

346. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)

Washington, December 4, 1963—10:40 p.m.

Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Dolores Perruso of Harriman's staff.

347. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) to the Secretary of State

Washington, December 5, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Memos and Misc. Top Secret. Sent also to the Secretary of Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, and the Administrator of the Agency for International Development.

348. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) to President Johnson

Washington, December 6, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Memos and Misc. Secret.

[349. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Central Intelligence Agency's Working Group on Vietnam \(Cooper\) to the Director of Central Intelligence \(McCone\)](#)

Washington, December 6, 1963.

Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, POL 1, General Political. Secret/Sensitive; Eyes Only.

[350. Editorial Note](#)

[351. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam](#)

Washington, December 6, 1963—10:29 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET-US. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared in draft with Rusk, in substance with Krulak, and with Bromley Smith. Repeated to CINCPAC eyes only for Felt. Also published in Declassified Documents, 1975, 212D.

[352. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, December 7, 1963, midnight.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26-1 S VIET. Secret; Limit Distribution. In *The Vantage Point*, pp. 62-63, Johnson recalls that Rusk sent him this cable and quotes from paragraph 1.

[353. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State](#)

Saigon, December 7, 1963, 7 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. Repeated to CINCPAC exclusive for Felt. Passed to the White House, the CIA, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

[354. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense \(McNamara\)](#)

Washington, December 7, 1963—12:40 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Francis H. Rawlings of the Office of the Secretary of State.

[355. Memorandum From Senator Mike Mansfield to President Johnson](#)

Washington, December 7, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Vietnam, Memos and Misc.

[356. Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs \(Bundy\) to President Johnson](#)

Washington, December 9, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Aides Files-Bundy, Memos to the President.

357. Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson

Washington, December 10, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Memos. to the President, McGeorge Bundy. Confidential.

358. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, December 10, 1963—6:39 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret; Flash; Limit Distribution. Repeated to Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Vientiane, Paris, London, and CINCPAC. Drafted by Koren; cleared by Hilsman in draft, by Forrestal, and by Harriman; and approved by Ball. Forrestal sent the following memorandum to Bundy, December 10, describing this telegram: "I have cleared an unnecessarily lengthy telegram from the Department to Lodge telling him we are against neutralism and want to win the war, and that is why McNamara is coming out. Any conference we might agree to about Cambodia would have nothing to do with neutralism in South Vietnam, and we are now inclined to doubt that circumstances make any conference on Cambodia possible. We are still consulting our allies and will keep in touch with the GVN." (Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Vietnam Cables) Bundy wrote "O.K." on the text of the memorandum.

359. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, December 11, 1963—7:30 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution. Repeated to Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Paris, London, and CINCPAC.

360. Memorandum From Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson

Washington, December 11, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Memos. and Misc. Top Secret. Also published in Declassified Documents, 1975, 174C.

361. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff

Washington, December 11, 1963—6:45 p.m.

Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Memoranda of Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Dolores Perruso.

362. Telegram From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)

Washington, December 12, 1963.

Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Cables. Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to the Department of State for Hilsman and the White House for McGeorge Bundy. The time of transmission on the source text is unclear.

363. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State

Saigon, December 12, 1963, 3 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 7 US/McNAMARA. Secret. Received at 5:15 a.m. and passed to the Department of Defense for McNamara at 6 a.m. and to the White House at 6:03 a.m.

364. Minutes of Meeting of the Special Group for Counterinsurgency.

Washington, December 12, 1963, 2 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Special Group Counterinsurgency Files: Lot 68 D 451, Minutes of Meetings. Secret. Drafted by James W. Dingeman who is not listed among the participants.

365. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam

Washington, December 12, 1963—3:55 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET Confidential; Priority. Drafted by Mendenhall; cleared by Hilsman, Robert J. McCloskey, Deputy Director, Office of News, Bureau of Public Affairs, and Frank P. Lockhart, public affairs officer in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs; and approved by Harriman. Repeated to CINCPAC, Phnom Penh, Bangkok, London, and Paris.

366. Memorandum From the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (Carroll) to the Secretary of Defense (McNamara)

Washington, December 13, 1963.

Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 69-A-3131, Vietnam 381. Secret; No Foreign Dissem.

323. Editorial Note

On November 22, 1963, at 12:30 p.m., Central Standard Time, President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas while traveling in an open car from Love Field to the Dallas Trade Mart where he was scheduled to give a speech on national security. The President was taken to Parkland Hospital in Dallas where doctors pronounced him dead at 1 p.m. The prepared text of the speech which President Kennedy planned to give, in which there is passing reference to Vietnam, is printed in Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1963, pages 890-894.

Vice President Johnson arrived at Parkland Hospital approximately 20 minutes before the President was pronounced dead. At 1:40 p.m., the Vice President left the hospital for Love Field. At 2:38 p.m., a Federal Judge administered the oath of office to President Johnson on Air Force One at Love Field. The President then departed on the presidential plane for Washington. (Johnson Library, President's Daily Diary)

324. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to President Johnson¹

Washington, November 23, 1963.

SUBJECT

Your Meeting with Ambassador Lodge

I attach a longer draft memorandum² of the results of the Honolulu conference. It was prepared by McGeorge Bundy and covers the highlights of the general discussion. Paragraphs 4 and 7 are the most important, and for your meeting with the Ambassador,³ I recommend the following points:

1. *Need for Teamwork.* It is absolutely vital that the whole of the Country Team, but particularly Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins, work in close harmony and with full consultation back and forth. There must be no back-biting or sniping at low levels such as may have contributed to recent news stories about General Harkins being out of favor with the new regime. A key element in this is the selection of a new deputy to the Ambassador, to replace William Trueheart. (Trueheart has been there more than two years, and the Ambassador agrees that he should now be replaced.) This is for the Secretary of State to work out, but what is needed is a good chief-of-staff type, able to work with the military, economic, and information people, knowing the area, and tough in pulling people together and ironing out any signs of dissension. Two names suggested have been William Sullivan (he is now Governor Harriman's assistant and the Governor may not want to let him go) and Norbert Anschuetz of the Paris Embassy. In any case, the Ambassador should know that he has your authority to select the best possible man that he and Secretary Rusk can find, and this matter should be worked out before he leaves Washington.
2. *Economic and Budget Problem.* The Honolulu conference highlighted that the new Vietnamese government faces a really serious 1964 budget problem requiring some combination of increased taxes, drawing on foreign exchange reserves, and other austerity measures, perhaps some greater US aid input (though this is tough for AID in view of Congressional cuts), and a really tight budget. The first step, agreed at Honolulu, is for Mr. Bell to get the strongest possible US team out to

discuss these problems with the new government, which is clearly very inexperienced and unsure of its ground. The Ambassador must really get into this problem, as the essence of it is political—whether the new government can take steps that may make sense from an economic standpoint without unduly weakening its political position and stability—which is vital to the war. With the new government just getting on its feet, long-term factors are secondary to the short-term problem of insuring its position.

We may well have to accept putting in more aid than we would theoretically like, to ensure the new government's standing, and we should be prepared to direct the necessary funding at whatever cost to other programs in AID or in the Military Assistance Program. (Incidentally, the overall tightness of funds highlights the importance of holding any further cuts in the total foreign aid bill to an absolute minimum.)

Robert S. McNamara

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Vietnam Cables. Secret.

² Not found.

³ See [Document 330](#).

325. Situation Report Prepared in the Department of State for President Johnson¹

Washington, November 23, 1963.

SITUATION IN VIET-NAM

As background for your talk with Ambassador Lodge the current situation in Viet-Nam is as follows:

Summary Assessment. The outlook is hopeful. There is better assurance than under Diem that the war can be won. We are pulling out 1,000 American troops by the end of 1963. The main concern is whether the generals can hold together until victory has been achieved. An immediate problem is an estimated budgetary deficit of roughly \$100 million after aid for 1964.

Political. The new "provisional" government consists of a Military Revolutionary Council, with an Executive Committee of 12 generals headed by General "Big" Minh as President; a Cabinet headed by former Vice President Tho as Premier; and a political advisory body called the "Council of Sages".

Minh and Tho, who are old friends, are working well together. Thus far no important signs of friction have developed among the generals. The uncertain element is the ambitious, emotional General Dinh, who is Minister of Public Security and retains command of the III Corps around Saigon.

The new government has the enthusiastic support of the urban population. The peasants remain apathetic as under the Diem regime, but the government recognizes the importance of moving to win their support.

Military. The Viet Cong incident rate shot up to a new high of about 1,000 per week immediately after the coup, but subsequently resumed to its "normal" level (300-500 per week). The most critical area is the Mekong Delta south and west of Saigon, and it is there that the new government is expected to concentrate its efforts.

The previously low troop ratio in the Delta is being improved. Officers and NCO's are being chosen on merit rather than political loyalty. The dual chain of command which plagued efficiency under Diem has given way to a single chain which will improve coordination of civil and military operations.

The government is expected to correct defects in the implementation of the strategic hamlet program, first by establishing a proper system of priorities for hamlet development from more secure toward less secure areas. Some delay is expected because the government is just establishing a new central organization for the strategic hamlet program, and the new administration will have to shake down at the local level because of changes in province and district chiefs.

Early action is needed to push forward with a fresh, realistic amnesty program to attract Viet Cong to surrender. The new government has not yet had a chance to focus on this problem.

We are pulling out by the end of 1963 about 1,000 of the 16,500 American military forces in Viet-Nam. This was announced on the conclusion of the McNamara-Taylor visit in October.

Economic. The major operational problem we face immediately is how to deal with an estimated 7 billion plaster (roughly \$100 million) deficit in the GVN 1964 budget after a United States aid contribution at the 1963 level (\$95 million in CIP and \$30 million in PL 480). Unless handled properly, this could prevent the generals from consolidating the new government politically.

Secretary McNamara was so concerned at Honolulu that he offered, if necessary, to switch some MAP funds to AID despite a shortage of \$12 million in MAP availabilities to meet field requirements. It still remains necessary to conduct a difficult negotiation with the Vietnamese Government to get it to do all it can to meet this budgetary deficit problem.

Relations with Foreign Countries. Our own relations with the new government are excellent at all levels. Ambassador Lodge would like to avoid putting heavy pressure on the new government over the next few months.

Cambodian-Vietnamese relations remain poor. Sihanouk of Cambodia is upset about the activities of Cambodian dissidents in Viet-Nam and

Thailand. Viet-Nam is concerned about Viet Cong use of Cambodian territory.

The new Vietnamese Government will work well with Phoumi in Laos. We are pressing it to work with Souvanna, too.

De Gaulle's relations with the new government are strained because he considers the coup a set-back to his hopes for neutralizing Viet-Nam.

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country File, Memos and Misc. Confidential. Transmitted to the President under cover of an undated memorandum from Rusk.

326. Briefing Paper Prepared in the Department of State for President Johnson¹

Washington, November 23, 1963.

THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING WITH HENRY CABOT LODGE, AMBASSADOR TO VIETNAM

1.

Purpose of visit

Ambassador Lodge is in Washington to discuss Viet-Nam with the President and other high U.S. officials who did not attend the Honolulu meeting on November 20.

2.

You may wish to:

- Commend Ambassador Lodge on his superb handling of a difficult situation.
- Draw him out on the Vietnamese situation:
 1. Political prospects of the new government.
 2. Military outlook.
 3. Changes in the strategic hamlet program.
 4. Anticipated course of negotiations to meet 1964 budgetary deficit.
- Review with him the draft National Security Action Memorandum emerging from the Honolulu meeting, which Mr. Bundy has initiated.²

3. Ambassador Lodge will raise two matters with you, but we are not informed as to what they are.

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country File, Memos and Misc., 11/63-12/63. Secret. Transmitted to the President under cover of an undated memorandum from Rusk.

² For the approved version, see [Document 331](#).

327. Memorandum of Conversation Between the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) and the Ambassador to Vietnam (Lodge)¹

Washington, November 24, 1963, 10 a.m.

SUBJECT

Viet-Nam—General Discussion

Lodge expressed gratitude and praise for the back-up by FE that he has received. Hilsman said that the high regard was mutual.

Lodge raised two other matters described in separate memos.²

Hilsman described the problem of the policy control of the Laos/ North Viet-Nam operations; Lodge had no strong opinions on the matter but understood our concern.

On the question of a Staley-type mission,³ Lodge said he had no opinion but would be willing to receive such a mission if Washington thought it was desirable.

Relations with Laos and Cambodia, including the Khmer Serei activities, were also discussed. Lodge is in agreement with our general program.

There were no problems of backstopping of the Embassy by Washington.

The only administrative matter on which Lodge had an opinion was on new plans for the Embassy. He felt that before the new Embassy was built the plans should be reviewed in the light of the experience that we had recently had. Specifically, the Embassy should be designed from a security/defense point of view. The Vietnamese were a violent people and something violent could happen in the future some time. Also, the plans should include a helicopter landing pad.

One other administrative matter concerned secure-voice equipment between the residence and the chancery. Such equipment was essential; it had the added advantage of providing a good excuse for an American guard 24 hours a day at the residence, which was highly desirable.

Lodge said he would look into the controls over air and artillery strikes and the question of an effective amnesty program. In general, however, he did not want to push the military committee around on specific issues, but let them develop in their own way, at least until they had worked out a method of operating and their internal relationships.

Also he wants Nes and cannot understand why any other department or agency of the government should have a voice in the appointment of his DCM.

In conversation with Harriman, Lodge agreed that Madame Nhu should not be permitted entry into the United States.

On the question of a Navy man at CINCPAC, Lodge expressed the interesting view that it might be better to have an Army man. Navy matters were routine in the Pacific; the real problem was going to come in any land warfare. In any land fighting the bulk of the troops would have to be Asian; the US should supply only enough men to justify an American as supreme commander. What we need, therefore, is a politically sensitive Army man who would understand the total problem and lay the groundwork for its solution.

The matter of Dr. Gard did not come up.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 1 S VIET-US. Secret Limit Distribution. Drafted and initialed by Hilsman. Approved in FE on November 29. Lodge traveled to Washington after the Honolulu Conference. A typewritten note on the source text reads: "No additional distribution without authorization from FE>/MT. Hilsman."

² Because of different distribution limitations, Hilsman made three separate memoranda of this conversation. The second is [Document 328](#); the third was not declassified.

³ For documentation on the Staley Mission to Vietnam, June and July 1961, see [vol. I, Documents 72](#) ff.

328. Memorandum of a Conversation Between the
Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs
(Hilsman) and the Ambassador to Vietnam (Lodge)¹

Washington, November 24, 1963, 10 a.m.

SUBJECT

Approach to North Viet-Nam

Lodge cited several intelligence reports to indicate that the North Vietnamese might be considering a way out of the war in South Viet-Nam. Further, Lodge is convinced that the North Vietnamese want more than anything else to have the American presence removed and he felt that we should exact some quid pro quo for withdrawing American forces rather than handing it to them on a silver platter, as our present plans for withdrawal would do.

What he proposes is a two-pronged approach to North Viet-Nam. The first is a stick: to pass word to the North Vietnamese that the Americans are impatient and are beginning to think of retaliatory action against North Viet-Nam unless they call off the Viet Cong. The second is a carrot: through a separate channel to pass word to the North Vietnamese that the Americans would be willing to withdraw provided they called off the Viet Cong.

Lodge was at pains to point out that this was quite different from De Gaulle's proposals for a reunified and neutralized Viet-Nam and also different from the Communist and Cambodian proposal for a neutralized South Viet-Nam. What he proposes is, in fact, the neutralization of North Viet-Nam—that is, make it into a Communist neutral along the lines of Yugoslavia.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted and initialed by Hilsman.

329. Memorandum of Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and the Ambassador to Vietnam (Lodge)¹

Washington, November 24, 1963.

SUBJECT
North Vietnam

Regarding NVN, Lodge's idea was that when SVN had made sufficient progress and clearly had the upper hand, we should first get word to NVN, in the form of a plant, that we planned an air strike if NVN did not stop their support of the Viet-Cong, and then develop some method by which, after they were in a fearful mood, direct contact would be made which would get them to stop support in return for our abandoning plans for striking NVN. Lodge believes NVN both fears American air attack and having to call on Red China for support, as NVN feels they would never be able to get Red China out.

Lodge agreed to let me know when he thought an opportunity had come to consider action along the above lines.

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Vietnam Cables. Secret; Eyes Only. Drafted by Harriman on December 7.

330. Memorandum for the Record of Meeting¹

Washington, November 24, 1963, 3 p.m.

SUBJECT

South Vietnam Situation

ATTENDANCE

The President, Secretaries Rusk, McNamara, Ball, Messrs. Bundy and McCone, Ambassador Lodge

1. Ambassador Lodge reported that the change in government had been an improvement, that he was hopeful over the outlook, that he expected a speedup of the war, he thought by February or March we would see marked progress. Lodge stated that we were not involved in the coup, though we put pressures on the South Vietnamese government to change its course and those pressures, most particularly on indications of withdrawal by 1965, encouraged the coup. Lodge stated that there were indications that North Vietnam might be interested in arrangements which would be of a nature satisfactory to us. He did not elaborate. He thought that everybody was very happy after the coup and showed some pictures of the crowds in Saigon. He mentioned that Gen. Don would be here and that those talking with him should influence him to put on all the pressure he could. He spoke most highly of the Papal delegate and his intention to see the Pope on Wednesday. [*1 sentence (2-1/2 lines) not declassified*] Lodge said he saw dangers of an anti-Christian move and this was his purpose in seeing the Pope. He made a point that Bishop Thuc had engaged in serious persecutions involving the imprisonment of a great many people, including three Catholic priests. He also made the point that Can, Diem's brother, also engaged in a variety of activities of persecution and the execution of individuals and that Can had, on his own premises, a burial ground for his victims. Lodge said that we were in no way responsible for the death of Diem and Nhu, that had they followed his advice, they would be alive today. He said that he saved Can from assassination and that Bishop Thuc was out of Saigon under orders from the Papal delegate. (*Note: I question whether the Papal delegate can order a Bishop out of a country.*) The tone of Ambassador Lodge's statements were optimistic, hopeful, and left the President with the impression that we are on the road to victory.

At this point McCone stated that our estimate of the situation was somewhat more serious. We had noted a continuing increase in Viet

Cong activity since the first of November as evidenced by a larger number of Viet Cong attacks. We also noticed with considerable concern a high level of message volume on the Viet Cong military and political networks and this might quite possibly reflect preparations for further sustained guerrilla pressures. Furthermore I stated that the military were having considerable trouble in completing the political organization of the government and were receiving little if any help from civilian leadership. Indeed it seemed to us that the competent civilians were staying on the sidelines and continuing their traditional role of critics rather than turning in and being helpful. I concluded by stating that we could not at this point or time give a particularly optimistic appraisal of the future.

The President then stated that he approached the situation with some misgivings. He noted that a great many people throughout the country questioned our course of action in supporting the overthrow of the Diem regime. He also noted that strong voices in the Congress felt we should get out of Vietnam. Both of these facts give the President considerable concern. He stated that he was not at all sure we took the right course in upsetting the Diem regime but this was a decision that he did not have to make as it was a fait accompli. He said now that it was done, we have to see that our objectives were accomplished. (*Note:* The inferences were that, left to his own devices, he would not have supported the courses of action which led to the coup.)

The President then stated he has never been happy with our operations in Vietnam. He said there had been serious dissension and divisions within the American community and he told the Ambassador that he was in total charge and he wanted the situation cleaned up. He wanted no more divisions of opinion, no more bickering and any person that did not conform to policy should be removed. At this point Mr. Bundy stated that we were searching for a replacement for Trueheart and what we wanted was a capable administrator who could run the Country Team. The President again repeated his insistence that the Ambassador was the Number One man and he, the President, was holding the Ambassador personally responsible.

Secretary McNamara stated that he had examined the economic situation and that he felt we must give generously of economic aid and must not ask the South Vietnamese government to do the impossible at this particular time.

The President then said that he supported this, but at the same time he wanted to make it abundantly clear that he did not think we had to

reform every Asian into our own image. He said that he felt all too often when we engaged in the affairs of a foreign country we wanted to immediately transform that country into our image and this, in his opinion, was a mistake. He was anxious to get along, win the war—he didn't want as much effort placed on so-called social reforms.

Note: I received in this meeting the first “President Johnson tone” for action as contrasted with the “Kennedy tone”. Johnson definitely feels that we place too much emphasis on social reforms; he has very little tolerance with our spending so much time being “do-gooders”; and he has no tolerance whatsoever with bickering and quarreling of the type that has gone on in South Vietnam.

The meeting was followed by a statement to the press which was given out by Bundy² to the effect that we would pursue the policies agreed to in Honolulu adopted by the late President Kennedy. A picture was taken of the President with Lodge, McNamara, Rusk and Ball.

¹ Source: Johnson Library, Meeting Notes File, Meeting with Lodge and Vietnam Advisers. Secret. Drafted by McCone on November 25. The meeting was held in the Executive Office Building. Johnson describes this meeting in *The Vantage Point*, pp. 43-44.

² This statement was apparently on a background basis; see the article in *The New York Times*, November 25, but datelined November 24, entitled “Johnson Affirms Aims in Vietnam, Retains Kennedy's Policy of Aiding War on Reds,” which cites a “White House Source.”

331. National Security Action Memorandum No. 273¹

Washington, November 26, 1963.

TO

The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Director of Central Intelligence
The Administrator, AID
The Director, USIA

The President has reviewed the discussions of South Vietnam which occurred in Honolulu, and has discussed the matter further with Ambassador Lodge.² He directs that the following guidance be issued to all concerned:

1. It remains the central object of the United States in South Vietnam to assist the people and Government of that country to win their contest against the externally directed and supported Communist conspiracy. The test of all U.S. decisions and actions in this area should be the effectiveness of their contribution to this purpose.
2. The objectives of the United States with respect to the withdrawal of U.S. military personnel remain as stated in the White House statement of October 2, 1963.³
3. It is a major interest of the United States Government that the present provisional government of South Vietnam should be assisted in consolidating itself and in holding and developing increased public support. All U.S. officers should conduct themselves with this objective in view.
4. The President expects that all senior officers of the Government will move energetically to insure the full unity of support for established U.S. policy in South Vietnam. Both in Washington and in the field, it is essential that the Government be unified. It is of particular importance that express or implied criticism of officers of other branches be scrupulously avoided in all contacts with the Vietnamese Government and with the press. More specifically, the President approves the following lines of action developed in the discussions of the Honolulu meeting of November 20. The offices of the Government to which central responsibility is assigned are indicated in each case.

5. We should concentrate our own efforts, and insofar as possible we should persuade the Government of South Vietnam to concentrate its efforts, on the critical situation in the Mekong Delta. This concentration should include not only military but political, economic, social, educational and informational effort. We should seek to turn the tide not only of battle but of belief, and we should seek to increase not only the control of hamlets but the productivity of this area, especially where the proceeds can be held for the advantage of anti-Communist forces.

(Action: The whole country team under the direct supervision of the Ambassador.)

6. Programs of military and economic assistance should be maintained at such levels that their magnitude and effectiveness in the eyes of the Vietnamese Government do not fall below the levels sustained by the United States in the time of the Diem Government. This does not exclude arrangements for economy on the MAP account with respect to accounting for ammunition, or any other readjustments which are possible as between MAP and other U.S. defense resources. Special attention should be given to the expansion of the import, distribution, and effective use of fertilizer for the Delta.

(Action: AID and DOD as appropriate.)

7. Planning should include different levels of possible increased activity, and in each instance there should be estimates of such factors as:

- A. Resulting damage to North Vietnam;
- B. The plausibility of denial;
- C. Possible North Vietnamese retaliation;
- D. Other international reaction.

Plans should be submitted promptly for approval by higher authority.

(Action: State, DOD, and CIA.)

8. With respect to Laos, a plan should be developed and submitted for approval by higher authority for military operations up to a line up to 50 kilometers inside Laos, together with political plans for minimizing the international hazards of such an enterprise. Since it is agreed that operational responsibility for such undertakings should pass from CAS to MACV, this plan should include a redefined method of political guidance

for such operations, since their timing and character can have an intimate relation to the fluctuating situation in Laos.

(Action: State, DOD, and CIA.)

9. It was agreed in Honolulu that the situation in Cambodia is of the first importance for South Vietnam, and it is therefore urgent that we should lose no opportunity to exercise a favorable influence upon that country. In particular a plan should be developed using all available evidence and methods of persuasion for showing the Cambodians that the recent charges against us are groundless.

(Action: State.)

10. In connection with paragraphs 7 and 8 above, it is desired that we should develop as strong and persuasive a case as possible to demonstrate to the world the degree to which the Viet Cong is controlled, sustained and supplied from Hanoi, through Laos and other channels. In short, we need a more contemporary version of the Jorden Report,⁴ as powerful and complete as possible.

(Action: Department of State with other agencies as necessary.)

McGeorge Bundy

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, NSAM's. Top Secret. NSAM 273 grew out of the discussion at the November 20 Honolulu Conference. McGeorge Bundy wrote the first draft and sent copies to Hilsman and William Bundy, asking for their opinions. In fact, Bundy's draft was almost identical to the final paper. The major exception was paragraph 7 of the Bundy draft which reads as follows: "7. With respect to action against North Vietnam, there should be a detailed plan for the development of additional Government of Vietnam resources, especially for sea-going activity, and such planning should indicate the time and investment necessary to achieve a wholly new level of effectiveness in this field of action. (Action: DOD and CIA)" (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous) Bundy thought that President Kennedy and Lodge might want to discuss this paper during their planned meeting on November 24. Hilsman responded on November 23 in a memorandum to McGeorge Bundy that he thought the draft was "fine" and he had made only minor changes. No record of

Hilsman's changes have been found. (*Ibid.*, Hilsman Papers, Country Series-Vietnam) Hilsman also sent a copy to Rusk under cover of a memorandum of November 23 and suggested the Secretary might find it of use at the Cabinet meeting scheduled for that afternoon. (Department of State, Cabinet Meeting Files: Lot 68 D 350) At the November 23 Cabinet meeting, Vietnam was not discussed.

² See [Document 330](#).

³ See [Document 170](#).

⁴ The Jordan report, entitled "A Threat to the Peace, North Viet-Nam's Effort To Conquer South Viet-Nam," was released by the Department of State on December 8, 1961. For documentation on the preparation and release, see [vol. I, pp. 282](#) ff.

332. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, November 27, 1963—8:40 p.m.

874. Following highlights from call on Hilsman by Tran Chanh Thanh, Vietnamese Ambassador to Tunisia and special representative to Kennedy funeral ceremonies:

1. Assured Thanh that President Johnson not only supports Kennedy policies toward Viet-Nam, but participated in making them. Will therefore give full support to new government in effective conduct of war.
2. Answering Thanh's query re significance US withdrawal 1,000 men from Viet-Nam,² Hilsman said withdrawal psychologically important in showing success, encouraging Vietnamese people by showing they can increasingly take over job, and deflating Communist propaganda about American objectives in Viet-Nam. To further query re withdrawal American forces by end 1965, Hilsman explained this means only training personnel since Vietnamese expected to be fully trained by then, and we shall keep in Viet-Nam whatever forces are needed for victory. Thanh said there had been erroneous interpretations of withdrawal announcements in Viet-Nam and suggested public clarification along these lines. Hilsman agreed we would find means following through on this suggestion (FYI we expect set up VOA interview with Hilsman), and proposed GVN also clarify matter publicly. GVN charge Rau (accompanying Thanh) also said that, in SVN withdrawal announcement was interpreted as intended to exert pressure on Diem Government and that we should remove this implication vis-a-vis new GVN. Hilsman agreed.
- 3.

Thanh raised Cambodian-Vietnamese relations. Said GVN had halted one Khmer Serei station, but broadcasts continuing from units not yet located. Asked whether US would assist in locating if GVN requested, and Hilsman replied affirmatively. (Can Saigon confirm that one station eliminated?)

Hilsman affirmed following further points Department officers made to Thanh November 26:

- a. Sihanouk in mood which could lead to establishment Communist base in Cambodia. Important GVN not stand too much on dignity, but in its own interest seize ball and actively seek improve relations with RKG.
- b. GVN should avoid negative attitude on Sihanouk's revived proposal for 14-nation conference to guarantee Cambodia's neutrality,³ and instead seek turn proposal to its own advantage. GVN should tell RKG it prepared agree formal assurances of respect for Cambodian neutrality provided RKG prepared 1) settle all important outstanding issues between two countries and 2) agree to cooperate in sealing frontier against Viet Cong.
- c. Issues to be comprised in overall settlement should include 1) delimitation and demarcation of frontier, 2) mutual renunciation of territorial claims, 3) financial issues, including payment GVN debt to Cambodia. RKG demands re Cambodian minority in Viet-Nam could be properly ignored since they are Vietnamese citizens.

Hilsman strongly urged prompt GVN initiative for bilateral talks with RKG along above lines. Embassy Saigon should follow up.

4.

Thanh said 14-nation conference should not be agreed to unless there was formal assurance it would not deal with Viet-Nam. We concurred.

He also said there should be virtually complete agreement on what conference to do, including text of any declaration or agreement, before conference convened. Otherwise Free World lends itself to Communist propaganda exploitation of conference forum, and gets whipsawed on substance. We also agreed this view.

5. Hilsman urged continued stress on modified, improved strategic hamlet program by new government, thereby avoiding danger of slipping into purely conventional warfare approach in dealing with VC.

Thanh leaving Washington November 28 and returning Saigon, December 3.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 29. Secret. Drafted by Mendenhall and cleared by Hilsman. Repeated to Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Vientiane, London, Paris, and CINCPAC for POLAD.

² See [Document 339](#).

³ On November 26, the Cambodian Foreign Ministry transmitted to the Embassy in Phnom Penh a copy of its note of November 24 to the Geneva Conference Cochairmen, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, requesting a reconvening of the 14 Geneva Conference participants in Djarkarta, Bandung, or Rangoon to discuss measures to ensure an "internationally guaranteed and controlled neutralization of Cambodia." Cambodia hoped that the United States would support the idea and warned that should the proposal fail, the situation in Cambodia could lead to international conflict and grave consequences. (Telegram 417 from Phnom Penh, November 26; Department of State, Central Files, POL 27-13 CAMB)

333. Memorandum Prepared for the Director of Central Intelligence¹

Washington, November 29, 1963.

SUBJECT

Viet Cong Quasi-Governmental Activities

1. In the "armed liberation" strategy of both Mao Tse-Tung and Ho Chi Minh, the establishment and gradual extension of "secure" base areas is a primary objective in the struggle. Within such secure areas, the Viet Cong have, since the beginning of resistance against the French in 1945-46, attempted to carry out quasi-governmental functions. Their purpose is two-fold and sometimes contradictory. They seek to win the voluntary support of the population by various activities of a welfare or civic-action nature. By example they try to show that they are more efficient, honest, and humane as administrators than the enemy regime. At the same time, they are concerned with exercising control and extracting support in the form of manpower, food and labor; these requirements frequently take priority and undo any favorable effects from their psychological operations.
2. In areas still not "secure" or not under strong Viet Cong influence, the guerrilla forces must live a hit-and-run existence and have little opportunity to act as the effective local administration. In these areas they must nonetheless rely upon support, shelter, and supply from the civilian populace, which is obtained not only by force but by positive steps to convince the population that its aspirations are those of the Viet Cong.
3. Much of our detailed knowledge with respect to Viet Cong activities in these directions comes from the period of Viet Minh resistance against the French. There is sufficient current reporting, however, to leave little doubt that the same pattern of activity is still being followed.
4. Viet Minh documents captured during the Indochina war frequently dealt with a program to raise rural living standards—the "new life" program. Such documents often contained statistics on the establishment of schools, numbers of children and adults in school, medical dispensaries, numbers of trained medical aides and midwives, sanitation efforts including numbers of wells and latrines dug, and food and livestock production. This effort and various other governmental activities were carried out under the authority of

Administrative-Resistance Councils set up at the regional, provincial, district, and town levels.

5. A similar Viet Cong hierarchy of military, politico-administrative, and Liberation Front Committees now exists in South Vietnam, but Viet Cong troops themselves are frequently the agents of both governmental and civic-action tasks. While force and terrorism remain a major Viet Cong instrument against local officials of the South Vietnamese Government and recalcitrant villagers, recently captured Viet Cong documents clearly show that Viet Cong troops and agents are ordered to provide assistance to peasants and to avoid antagonisms and abuses, such as looting or violation of churches and pagodas.
6. A Communist land reform program in South Vietnam, begun by the Viet Minh, is still being carried out under the Viet Cong, but some difficulties have been encountered. This is reflected in the attitude of the Liberation Front, which watered down its initial emphasis on land reform, although free and unconditional distribution of land to poor peasants is still a part of its platform. Informants and Viet Cong prisoners indicate that early attempts by the Viet Cong to force "middle-class" peasants to give land to the poor were too harsh, caused peasant disputes and loss of production, and depleted the source of funds available for peasant loans and for support of Viet Cong troops. As a result, there appears to have been some modification of Viet Cong land reform activities to lessen pressure on "middle-class" peasants and encourage higher production. Although there are some references to communal farms, the Viet Cong do not appear to have stressed land collectivization in South Vietnam, where popular reaction to North Vietnam's brutal agrarian reform policies has been adverse.
7. Current reports also indicate that the Viet Cong provide assistance to peasants in land clearance, seed distribution, and harvesting, and in turn persuade or force peasants to store rice in excess of their own needs for the use of guerrilla troops. Controls are apparently imposed in Viet Cong zones to prevent shipments for commercial marketing in Saigon, or to collect taxes on such shipments. The Viet Cong themselves often pay cash or give promissory notes for the food they acquire.
8. Little detailed information is available on current Communist health and sanitation activities. Captured Viet Cong doctors or medical personnel indicate that dispensaries for treatment of Viet Cong wounded often are scattered inconspicuously among several peasant homes in a village, and that civilians are treated as facilities and supplies permit. Civilians as well as guerrilla forces are almost certainly instructed in methods of sanitation and disease prevention, but apparent shortages of medical personnel and medicines in some areas

suggest that medical care for civilians in Viet Cong-dominated areas may be spotty.

9. There are also references to primary and adult education, much of it in the form of indoctrination, and to Viet Cong-run schools operating almost side by side with government schools, under the excuse that peasants lack the necessary documentation required to enter government schools. A Liberation Front broadcast of 19 November 1963 claimed that there were some 1,000 schools with 2 million pupils in "freed areas" of South Vietnam. These figures are doubtless exaggerated, but may be a gauge of a fairly extensive Communist educational effort.
10. A standard Viet Cong technique of gaining a foothold among tribal minorities in the highland areas of South Vietnam—where Communist encouragement of tribal autonomy gives them a political appeal—has been to select promising tribesmen, take them to North Vietnam for training in welfare activities as well as for political indoctrination, and return them to tribal villages where their new skills tend to assure them positions of prestige and leadership.
11. The Viet Cong also promote cultural activities—heavily flavored with propaganda—through press, radio and film media, as well as live drama and festivals. A student informant reported attending dramatic performances in a Viet Cong-held area, where plays, song, and dances provided entertainment and a dose of propaganda—often enthusiastically received.
12. There is little firm information about the Viet Cong effort to develop "combat hamlets." They appear to exist in areas where control by either side is missing or tenuous, and sometimes are located near government "strategic hamlets." Reports indicate that, like strategic hamlets, they are fortified externally, and their inhabitants are carefully trained in defensive procedures and escape routes, often interrelated with other nearby hamlets. Similar defensive systems have long prevailed in Viet Cong-controlled areas, although Viet Cong installations themselves may be innocent looking and easily evacuated buildings or huts.
13. A Viet Cong document discussing the successful construction of a "combat hamlet" indicates that primary stress is laid on determining the basic wants and needs of the inhabitants—frequently their concern for their own land. Propaganda is directed at convincing them that the government is threatening their interests, that defensive measures must be taken, and finally that offensive actions against government officials and troops are needed. The peasants presumably come to regard the Viet Cong as their protectors and to cooperate voluntarily with the Viet Cong military effort.

¹ Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, POL 26 Rebellion, Coups, Insurgency. Secret; No Foreign Dissem. McCone sent this memorandum to Rusk under cover of a December 2 memorandum, which reads as follows:

“You will recall at our recent meeting in Honolulu spokesmen from Saigon mentioned that the Viet Cong were engaged in such activities as defended hamlets, school and medical programs, etc.

“In view of the above the attached memorandum representing the views of the CIA staff on these activities may be of particular interest to you.”

For the discussion at the Honolulu meeting, see [Document 321](#).

334. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, November 30, 1963, 4 a.m.

1093. CINCPAC for POLAD. Conversation with General Minh Saturday a.m. Nov 30.

1. I told him of President Johnson's determination to continue U.S. help to V.N.'s struggle for freedom, which he much appreciated.
2. He said recent Viet Cong successes, especially the daytime attacks, were due to VC infiltration of GVN units, notably of the Special Forces. This had been going on for two years with the connivance of Nhu who in his last days had appealed directly to the Viet Cong for help. Of this they have proof. Also the Viet Cong had been engaged in selling charcoal to the Government of Viet Nam for a long time.
3. Minh was now engaged in cleaning out the infiltrators, getting rid of the politically appointed non-commissioned officers and bringing the capable officers into the key places.
4. These recent experiences have taught them that in every case the people have left the bad Strategic Hamlets and have returned to their old homes close to their own fields, but that the people have stayed in the good Strategic Hamlets.
5. The Viet Cong were taking advantage of the change of government to capitalize on all that they had gained under the former regime.
6. For the future the GVN intended to base themselves on the good Strategic Hamlets. The efforts to construct Strategic Hamlets had been spread much too thin and instead of allocating 20,000 plasters for each Strategic Hamlet he wanted to concentrate a larger sum of money on a few that were really good. He had already spoken to Brent about this.
7. He wanted the creation of a U.S. team to work with their teams as a "braintrust". He realized that Nhu had kept the Americans at arm's length. They, however, had nothing to hide and wanted to have us understand all the details of their operations as much as possible.
8. Both he and General Kim who was present throughout attached great importance to what they had accomplished with the Hoa Hao's and Cao Dai's. He said there were two million Hoa Hao's. They were rabidly anti-Communist, they knew the country and were a great

asset. Diem had lost them by trying to force them into becoming Christians.

9. He said he was still not satisfied with the intelligence he was getting and wanted American help in this regard.
10. The number one priority was Saigon, Cholon and the Delta. He wanted to make an "oil spot" type of operation-something which would spread out. They could not be strong everywhere. They would organize this area with three Generals two of whom were General Phat and General Thieu whose power was delegated from that of General Dinh. The third was General Co. They had complete authority over the province chiefs and district delegates as regards military matters.
11. On the matter of Cambodia they wanted us to find out whether the Thais were supporting the Khmer Serei. FYI Please advise me.
12. Also did any U.S. Government activity of any kind help Diem's regime to get the Khmer Serei broadcast started. FYI Please advise.
13. Kim asked this question: If Sihanouk is proven to be a Communist, will the United States put a nationalist in power in Cambodia? What will the United States do? FYI What, if anything, should I say to this?
14. They expect the Laotian Army to send a delegation to visit Viet Nam in the near future and are looking forward to it.
15. I again brought up the question of Ngo Dinh Can and was told that they had no intention whatever of killing him and I got the distinct impression that if the tribunal should sentence him to death there was a good chance he would get clemency.
16. There was no doubt at all that these men are most eager to get on with the war and intend to leave no stone unturned. But, in order to show our eagerness, I said that I hoped to be in a position on my next trip to the United States to make a public statement on their accomplishments and also to appear before the Senate and House in a position to point to concrete results and not just to talk about intentions and hopes. When General Minh asked me when I hoped to do this I set the date ahead about a month of what I really plan and said at the end of January. He and General Kim looked at each other but didn't reject that date as impossible so maybe there'll be something by the end of February.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution. Repeated to Phnom Penh, Vientiane,

Bangkok, and CINCPAC.

335. Central Intelligence Agency Information Report¹

Washington, December 2, 1963.

SUBJECT

Situation Appraisal as of 30 November 1963

TDCS-3/658,154

1. This is a field appraisal of the current situation. It is not an official judgment by this Agency or any component thereof. It represents the observations and interpretations of a staff officer based on information available to him at the time of its preparation. Prepared for internal use as a guide to the operational environment, this commentary is disseminated in the belief that it may be useful to other agencies in assessing the situation for their own purposes.
2. Although the Viet Cong (VC) overall incident rate continued to decline this week, enemy activity remained well above normal levels and included several significant successes. Perhaps the most notable VC success was the apparently unimpeded entry of a 300-man force into the US Special Forces civilian irregular defense training camp at Hiep Hoa, Hau Nghia Province, on 24 November. The circumstances behind this VC victory, which resulted in sizeable casualties (including the presumed capture of four Americans) and weapons losses, are not entirely clear, but there is evidence that security arrangements were inadequate; betrayal by some of the strike forces elements within the camp itself is also a possibility. The heaviest enemy activity continued to center on the 5th, 7th, and 9th Division areas, but other areas also responded with higher than usual levels of action to obvious Hanoi orders to exert heavy pressure on the new regime before it had adequate time in which to get organized.
3. The intensive activity of the VC this month has thus far failed of its apparent purpose of inducing panic in the new regime; nevertheless it has demonstrated a continuing, and in some areas an enhanced, enemy capability for sustaining a high level of activity over a period of time spanning several weeks. Perhaps even more disturbing than the VC's continued offensive abilities is evidence of a growing defensive capability against air-supported assault by government forces. A government operation on 24-25 November in reaction to a VC attack in An Xuyen Province encountered heavy fire from what is believed to have been a VC anti-aircraft company prepositioned in anticipation

with the result that a number of aircraft were damaged or destroyed. The anti-aircraft fire also helped prevent the operation, once the troops landed, from developing the momentum necessary to close off the VC defenders' avenues of escape. In another area of the Delta, the government on 24 November captured two US 50 calibre machine guns mounted on anti-aircraft blocks, an anti-aircraft speed sight and a hand-held lead and range estimation device. With the exception of the machine guns, the equipment appears to be of Chinese Communist and/or Russian origin.

4. The assassination of President Kennedy has evoked strong emotions of sympathy in South Vietnam, the open articulation of which has undoubtedly been facilitated by the new atmosphere of greater friendship which has to date marked the post-coup period. In addition to an impressive memorial march by high school and university students on 25 November, memorial services at the Cathedral and at Xa Loi have been held in the presence of representatives of the Military Executive Council (MEC)—including Major General Duong Van Minh—and of the provisional government. The Saigon press, both vernacular and foreign language, has been full of expressions of sympathy and of confidence that the American-Vietnamese relationship will continue close under President Lyndon B. Johnson.
5. MEC Chairman Minh on 23 November signed a decree fixing the statute of the Consultative Council of Sages. The new council will consist of from "40 to 80 members selected from circles representing all nationalist tendencies and walks of life," who will participate at the invitation of General Minh. One feature of the statute which is not likely to sit well with some political leaders is the powers given to Nguyen Ngoc Tho, in his capacity as Prime Minister, in relation to the council's work. Several politicians had previously complained in private that Tho was maneuvering to give his mostly southern associates disproportionate representation in the projected council. The membership of the new council does not appear to have been finally decided; there is one report that the Generals have rejected a proposed first list sent up to the MEC, presumably by Tho. Several prominent nationalist politicians, meanwhile, appear to question the realism of the suggestion made by some advisors of the MEC that a two party system be established in South Vietnam; a position which would seem to receive considerable support from the fact that some seventeen groups have already applied to the MEC for permission to form parties.
6. In this initial post-coup shakedown period, it is difficult to trace out the lines of policy implementation within the MRC. Although the triumvirate of Minh and Major Generals Le Van Kim and Tran Van Don appears to exercise overall control and is the source of most of the

policy guidance, the inner workings, both vertically and horizontally, of the MEC below this level remain obscure, especially in question of the degree to which the Minh-Kim-Don combine is privy of and controls the day to day activities of the other Generals in their respective spheres of responsibility. Slippage between the generally well intended policy lines laid down by the MEC leaders and actual implementation seems the greatest in connection with the handling of police affairs by Maj. Gen. Mai Huu Xuan, who continues to pack the Directorate-General and police with old cronies, some of whom are of questionable repute, and to pursue with perhaps greater than necessary zeal the roundup for questioning of officials connected with the Diem regime. In the Ministry of Information, Brig. Gen. Tran Tu Oai is taking a considerably less liberal view of freedom of the press than that apparently held by Minh and his immediate associates, reportedly having outlined to editors a fairly extensive list of taboo subjects.

7. Field dissem. State (Ambassador Lodge) USMACV (General Harkins), CINCPAC PACAF ARPAC PACFLT.

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Vietnam Memos. Secret; Routine; No Foreign Dissem/No Dissem Abroad/Controlled Dissem Background Use Only. A note on the source text indicates this information was acquired in Saigon on and before November 30; as it was commentary, it was unappraised. Also published in *Declassified Documents*, 1975, 56 E.

336. Memorandum From President Johnson to the Secretary of State¹

Washington, December 2, 1963.

In our conversation this morning,² we did not have time to get to South Vietnam. I continue to think that it is a matter of the highest importance that we should get an absolutely first-class Deputy Chief of Mission for Ambassador Lodge. I count on having your recommendation before the end of the week, and just as an example of the standard I am hoping to set, let me say to you privately that I have heard very good things of William H. Sullivan and Norbert L. Anschuetz, who is now in Paris.

I note in Lodge's 1093³ that Big Minh talks about the creation of a U.S. team to work as a brain trust. If it can be done quietly, this seems to me a very good idea, and I think we ought to ask Lodge promptly for his recommendations on the size, structure and composition of such a team. Then if he responds, we ought to get the right people to him just as fast as we can.

I am planning to have a meeting on this whole Vietnam matter next week, and I am asking Bundy to get out the necessary interdepartmental guidance, but I send this memorandum because I feel that you and I must be closely in touch and right on top of this situation all the way.

Lyndon B. Johnson

¹ Source: Department of State, S/S-NSC Files: Lot 72 D 316, NSAMs. Secret.

² Rusk met the President at the White House at noon. (Johnson Library, Dean Rusk Appointment Book) No other record of the conversation has been found.

³ Document 334.

337. Memorandum From President Johnson to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Washington, December 2, 1963.

The more I look at it, the more it is clear to me that South Vietnam is our most critical military area right now. I hope that you and your colleagues in the Joint Chiefs of Staff will see to it that the very best available officers are assigned to General Harkins' command in all areas and for all purposes. We should put our blue ribbon men on this job at every level.²

Lyndon B. Johnson

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 69 A 3131, Vietnam 210. Secret.

² The President sent a similar memorandum to McCone, December 2, which reads as follows: "The more I look at South Vietnam, the more I think we must be very quick and firm in getting the best possible men on the job. I did not understand from our last conversation whether you mean to put in a top-notch man, in place of Richardson, or whether you mean to promote the man on the spot. My own conviction is that this job requires the best and most experienced man we can find, and I would hope to have your definite recommendation within the next few days." Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Memos and Misc.)

338. Letter From M. Lyall Breckon of the Vietnam Working Group to the First Secretary of the Embassy in Vietnam (Miller)¹

Washington, December 2, 1963.

DEAR BOB: We were intrigued, in your interesting memorandum of a conversation with *[less than 1 line not declassified]*, November 17,² at *[less than 1 line not declassified]* statement that friends of his had seen papers indicating the late Brother Nhu had reached an advanced point in negotiations with the DRV and that terms had been set under which Ho Chi Minh would be President of reunified Viet-Nam, and Nhu Vice President. Both for the historical record and as an indication of how eager the DRV was for a negotiated settlement, it would be interesting to have further details or even copies of such papers. Do you think it would be feasible to pursue the matter, either with *[less than 1 line not declassified]* or through CAS channels? It seems curious that the Generals have not made public the proof they say they have ("Big" Minh to the Ambassador November 30, Embtel 1093, for example³) of Nhu's dealings with the North, as further justification for the coup.

From various references I gather *[less than 1 line not declassified]* interests have taken a strong political turn. Please remember us to him and *[less than 1 line not declassified]*.

Incidentally, on the subject of the ancien regime, you might be interested to know the New York Times yesterday published two pictures of the bodies of Diem and Nhu. They were radiophotos, however, and scarcely recognizable.

Claire joins me in sending our best regards to you, Kaity, and the children. We hope you survived the change of government without trauma. Our own chagrin at leaving two months too early is still very much alive.⁴

Yours very truly,

M. Lyall Breckon⁵

¹ Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, POL 27 Coups, Rebellion, Insurgency. Secret; Official-Informal.

² Attached but not printed.

³ Document 334.

⁴ No reply has been found.

⁵ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

339. Editorial Note

On December 2, 1963, General Harkins made the following announcement:

"On December 3 the first increment of approximately 300 U.S. military personnel will be withdrawn from the Republic of Vietnam. They will be followed during the next two or three weeks by another 700, making a total reduction in force of 1000 before the end of 1963.

"The fact that this reduction can be made at this time reflects much credit on both the American Advisory and Support personnel and their Vietnamese counterparts who have assimilated knowledge and techniques in a most commendable manner. The training of Vietnamese personnel has progressed to the point where the withdrawal of some US forces is possible."

The full text of the statement is in Department of the Army telegram DA 946750 to Saigon, November 30; Johnson Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country File. Also published in *Declassified Documents*, 1976, 156 D.

340. Telegram From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Felt)¹

Washington, December 2, 1963—4:48 p.m.

JCS 3799. Eyes only for Admiral Felt and General Harkins.

1. At a meeting of the JCS and SecDef the following conclusions were reached from the evidence available here concerning the military situation in South Vietnam. Your comments are requested:
 - a. The GVN desires to respond to US advice and to improve its operational effectiveness. It has the capability to do so and its plans are basically sound, but it is in a state of organizational turmoil.
 - b. The VC are making an intensive effort to increase their hold on the countryside while the new government is shaking down.
 - c. The VC have exhibited a powerful capability for at least a brief period of intensified operations, and their skill in counter-airborne operations is improving.
 - d. There is ground for concern that infiltration of materiel has increased, but little hard proof. This is a prime intelligence deficiency. It affects not only military tactics but our over-all Southeast Asia strategy.
2. If these conclusions are valid they generate several questions:
 - a. What specifically is being done to increase the intensity of GVN offensive activity to the 20 day per month level contemplated in the National Campaign Plan? What are the prospects?
 - b. What specific steps are being taken to enhance the quality, effectiveness and number of the paramilitary forces in the critical Delta area? What is the progress?
 - c. Is there reason to be apprehensive that the junta is not able to control General Dinh? One report is that he blocked the proposed corps command shift. Should the junta be urged to take action against him?
 - d. What more can be done—in Vietnam, Washington or elsewhere—to give a clearer and more substantial picture of the infiltration situation?

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 71 A 6489, Viet Sensitive. Top Secret. Drafted by Krulak. Repeated for

information to Harkins.

341. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, December 3, 1963, 11 a.m.

1103. CINCPAC for POLAD. Deptel 884.² I am unable to predict new GVN's reaction to specific Cambodian neutrality proposal. But when I saw General Minh and General Kim on Saturday, they asked the US to say what our attitude would be if it were definitely proven that Sihanouk was, in fact, in the ChiCom camp (see my 1093).³ They also asked specifically whether we would try and remove Sihanouk and put in a "nationalist" Chief of State. They also stressed the fact that if Cambodia were truly neutral, with the result that the frontier would be truly sealed off, the war against the Viet Cong would be immensely helped.

In view of this very forthright expression of their position, I wonder whether the Department wants me to go back to them at this time. Certainly, before I do so, I need further clarification. While I see the merit of some of the arguments advanced in Deptel 884, it seems to me that the instruction glosses over some fundamental points.

The basic point about the Cambodian proposal is that it is not aimed at Communist encroachment in Southeast Asia but rather at giving Sihanouk international assurances against encroachment by Vietnam and Thailand. (The United States is now also accused and, as I note that we are not prepared to participate in a conference so long as the Cambodian charges stand, it would not be surprising if Vietnam and Thailand should take a similar stance.)

Given the fact that Sihanouk's proposal is clearly and openly aimed at his neighbors, it follows that he will not be satisfied unless we and the other Geneva powers give him some kind of assurance against what he seems to be really afraid of: Vietnamese and/or Thai aggression. Unfortunately, in Vietnamese eyes, this would appear to be siding with a country fully prepared to collaborate with the Communists against a country engaged in a bitter armed struggle against Communist aggression.

Moreover, if we fall in with Sihanouk's proposal in the face of patent blackmail, we shall do ourselves incalculable damage in this country and, I should think, in other Far East countries which are stoutly anti-Communist. If we put Sihanouk in a position to involve us in consultations with Communist powers regarding alleged threats to Cambodian neutrality and territorial integrity on the part of anti-Communist countries in the area—and I do not think we could realistically expect to leave the conference table having conceded less than this—we shall undermine the confidence of the new Vietnamese leadership in the firmness of our purpose here and play into the hands of the advocates of neutralism for South Vietnam.

Finally, I think that rather than improving the chances of bilateral cooperation between Cambodia and Vietnam—which holds out our best chance for sealing the border—Sihanouk's conference proposal would have the reverse effect. So long as Sihanouk thinks that there is a chance of sheltering under a big power umbrella and blackmailing us regularly, he is not likely to come to terms bilaterally with his neighbors. This may be, incidentally, one reason why he has deliberately failed to take advantage of the improved attitude of Vietnam toward Cambodia.

As for the ICC, given its composition and its dependence on Cambodian cooperation for its effectiveness, I do not think that we could realistically expect it to seal off the border. On past performance, Sihanouk would wish to use it only to verify Vietnamese encroachments and the Poles could be counted on to see that it was not used in such a way as to interfere seriously with Viet Cong activities.

I would appreciate the Department's comments on the above. I realize the pressures that are on us to participate in the conference and the risk that, if we do not, Sihanouk may make further irrational moves, including calling in the Chinese Communists. The latter would evidently confront us with grave decisions. It is a risk, however, which seems to me worth taking rather than accepting the near certainty of a serious deterioration of our position in South Vietnam if we yield to Sihanouk's blackmail. We are also under pressure from the GVN and we have an overriding interest in keeping their morale high in view of the major military effort we are rightly demanding of them.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27-13 CAMB. Secret; Immediate; Limit Distribution. Repeated to Bangkok, London, Paris, Vientiane, Ottawa, Phnom Penh, New Delhi, Moscow, and CINCPAC. Passed to the White House.

² In telegram 884, December 1, the Department of State instructed the Embassies in Saigon and Bangkok to convey to their host governments U.S. views on Sihanouk's proposal for a conference on Cambodian neutrality. Generally the Department favored the proposal. (*Ibid.*)

³ Document 334.

342. Letter From the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge) to
the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs
(Harriman)¹

Saigon, December 3, 1963.

DEAR AVERELL: This relates to our conversation² concerning the putting of pressure on North Viet-Nam with a view to making a sort of Tito³ out of Ho Chi Minh.

First, as you requested, I enclose the text of the notes from which I read. Secondly, it has occurred to me that one possible channel would be from me to D'Orlandi, the Italian Ambassador here, from D'Orlandi to Maneli, the Polish representative on the I.C.C., and from Maneli to Pham Van Dong or Ho Chi Minh.

I have gotten to know D'Orlandi very well and believe he can be trusted. He is also an extremely precise man and well able to handle an idea in all its various refinements and shadings. This is something for you to consider. I realize you may have a better way.

With all my best wishes,

As ever yours,

Cabot L.

Enclosure

Saigon, October 30, 1963.

TOWARD THE NEUTRALIZATION OF NORTH VIET-NAM⁴

This is a proposal for study and analysis in Washington in the light of the much greater store of information available there. While it does not purport to be a finished proposal, I hope it will stimulate thinking, which will eventually lead to such a proposal.

H.C. Lodge

1. The McNamara-Taylor judgment, announced at the White House on October 2,⁵ that the U.S. could complete the major part of its task in South Viet-Nam (SVN) by 1965, with the implication that withdrawal of most U.S. military personnel would then be possible, could create an opportunity for a U.S. demarche toward North Viet-Nam (NVN).
2. This paper seeks to describe this opportunity. It therefore does not consider the merits of the question of whether or not the U.S. should withdraw by 1965. And, it certainly does not foreclose our right not to withdraw if this seems like the prudent course to follow at the time.
3. There are straws in the wind which indicate that there is an off-chance that the present may be a favorable moment for such a demarche. One is the apprehension in NVN, so frequently reported, concerning an increase in ChiCom influence because of the Sino-Soviet split. Another is the acute food shortage. Still another would be found in [*document number not declassified*],⁶ if true, regarding the departure of Soviet technicians. Finally, there is a remark made by the North Viet-Nam Ambassador to Laos on September 16 to UPI reporter Ray Herndon. After Herndon had asked the Ambassador whether NVN would be interested in negotiating with SVN, the latter is reported to have replied: "Why deal with the son when we can deal with the father?" (The "son" being SVN and the "father" being the U.S.)
4. What follows is also not a scheme to unify North and South Viet-Nam; it is still less a scheme to neutralize South Viet-Nam. On the contrary, it aims at a ChiCom rollback; it is a move towards neutralizing NVN alone; it should tend to strengthen the anti-Communist position in SVN; it seeks to contend with the Communists over what they (the Communists) have rather than contending with them over what we have.
5. Now for the proposal itself. If, pursuant to the McNamara-Taylor announcement, we undertake a definitive withdrawal of U.S. troops from Viet-Nam, to be completed by a certain date, we will be doing something which NVN strongly desires. We should, therefore, seek maximum leverage from such withdrawal and use it to put pressure on and to obtain concessions from NVN. Available information indicates NVN strongly desires U.S. troop withdrawal.
6. They should, therefore, be made to pay for it and not give it to them for nothing. One concession we should insist on would be cessation of support for Viet Cong and Pathet Lao. (I doubt that they could bring about a VC cease fire, even if they tried—unless it was a mutual cease fire, involving both VC and GVN.)
- 7.

I do not visualize a neutralized and united Viet-Nam; on the contrary, I look for a militantly anti-Communist SVN with a Yugoslavia-like neutralist nation to the north. I do not propose a negotiation; I propose that they be told: U.S. would like to unload—if terms were right—perhaps leave some economic aid, but withdraw troops, provided NVN stops supplying Viet Cong and Pathet Lao and tries for a cease fire. A long-term food agreement might be possible.

From another quarter they could be told that if they don't stop aid to VC and PL, they will suffer.

One example of what we might hope for from such a demarche would be sealed borders into Laos and South Viet-Nam in the manner of the Greek-Yugoslav border at the time of the civil war there. Surely this would make our work in SVN very much more manageable.

8. As a carrot to NVN, substantial offers of food support, both from the U.S. and SVN, might be tendered. As a stick, NVN could be informed that American patience with their continued support of VC and Pathet Lao is wearing thin and that their supply bases supporting Communist efforts in Laos and SVN may not be indefinitely permitted to operate from the sanctuary of NVN. Perhaps this point would be made believable if CAS were one night to destroy one NVN supply depot. Others better informed than I must estimate risk which this action would incur of bringing more ChiCom influence into NVN than is there already.
9. Other thoughts on the matter: The neutralization of NVN might be attractive to the Soviet Union, as counterbalancing the ChiCom influence in Albania. Our reputation among Communists for impatience and impulsiveness might make our proposal plausible to a North Viet-Nam official who is looking for something with which to counter ChiCom hegemony. Also, Ho Chi Minh has a unique prestige and may be one of the few who could pull off such a change of course. Perhaps we should hurry up and try to use him while he is still around. The report from French Delegate General at Hanoi (Paris No. 55, November 13⁷) quoting Pham Van Dong as saying U.S. will tire of fight may mean that McNamara-Taylor report has convinced NVN we really might get out and thus makes this proposal particularly believable.
10. Is it not doubtful that SVN can ever know true peace and tranquillity without neutralization of NVN? And if NVN, thinking that they are winning in SVN, rejects what is here proposed, what have we lost? We will not, in case these ideas lead to nothing, have in any way

prejudiced our right to keep our troops in SVN after 1965 if this seems like the wise thing to do at the time.

¹ Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 72 D 219, TIGER Basic File. Secret; Eyes Only.

² No record of this conversation has been found.

³ President of the Republic of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito.

⁴ Secret; Eyes Only. Reviewing his papers after retiring as Assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern Affairs, William P. Bundy described this proposal by Lodge as follows: "A bizarre aberration. Never considered or taken seriously by anyone, so far as I know." (Department of State, Bundy Files, Chronology, 1964)

⁵ See [Document 170](#).

⁶ Not found.

⁷ Reference is to telegram 2324 from Paris, repeated to Saigon as telegram 55, November 13. It reported that French sources indicated that DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong stated that the coup in Saigon was a "step in the right direction," and that the "U.S. would tire of the fighting and in that case DRV would show itself as supple as it is now rigid. It is still not the moment for negotiations." (Department of State, Central Files, POL 32-4 VIET) The reference to this November 13 cable in a document dated October 30 leads to the conclusion that Lodge revised this paper after October 30 to include the Dong remarks.

343. Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Harkins) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor)¹

Saigon, December 4, 1963, 11 a.m.

MAC J00 9294. Eyes only for Admiral Felt and General Taylor. A. JCS 3799 DTG 022148Z.² Following keyed to paras of Ref A.

- 1.a. Concur. It is view of Gen Don it will be another month before organizational turmoil subsides and modification basic plans effected. I am inclined to agree.
- 1.b. Concur. VC are expending every effort to capitalize on turmoil resultant from coup. They have been effective in attaining this objective however definite reduction in their activity can be noted in the last week. VC incidents this week dropped to 518 from 666 and attacks dropped to 84 from 106.
- 1.c. Concur in part. VC have demonstrated capability at least for brief period of making intensified effort. Intensity of operations has resulted in some gains in some areas of the country side. Reports from corps area yesterday indicate no strat hamlet occupied or attacked by VC during post coup. Intensified opns continue under VC control in I, II and IV Corps. In III Corps 8 strat hamlets in Kien Tuong Prov recently occupied by VC remain under their control. Consider also that possibly all of anti GVN activity may not properly be attributed to VC. At least some of past activity may be result of activity of dissident elements. Concur VC have improved skill in counter-airborne operations basically because of more targets, better weapons, and intensified training.
- 1.d. Share your concern that infiltration of materiel has increased. This is not situation which can be classified as post coup as indicators this regard have been apparent for some time. Have hard proof of increase in this area and while it not overly alarming as to intensity it is significant. Agree that it has effect not only on military tactics but also on our over-all SE Asia strategy. Recent study prepared this subject and submitted to Ambassador for transmittal to Sec State.³ Copies being provided JCS and CINCPAC.
- 2.a. To date little has been accomplished toward increasing the intensity of GVN offensive activity to the statistical 20 day per month level. The drop in intensity which occurred in immediate post coup period has

been substantially restored; however, anticipated increase in intensity has not as yet been realized. Believe note should be taken here that statistical level of operational intensity is not necessarily the best indicator of operational effectiveness. The development and execution of comprehensive opnl plans and the freeing of elements tied to static defensive positions has commanded the principal attention of the senior comdrs. Avowed aims of MRC are qualitative improvement and intensification of opns. Believe prospects are good for ultimate realization these objectives; however, as indicated in para 1.a. above Gen Don holds view that another month will be required before MRC has weathered reorganization. RVN revision of basic plan nearing completion.

2.b. In the 7th, 9th and 21st Division areas the following steps have been accomplished or are planned to improve para-military forces:

- (1) The elimination of small outposts and watchtowers is proceeding apace under leadership of Gen Co, and until yesterday Col Dong of 7th. Co's basic plan is to move the SDC from outposts into hamlets depriving VC of lucrative targets and providing interim defense of hamlets without militia. CG freed from outposts will be formed into mobile units.
- (2) Senior comdrs in Delta realize that CG and SDC units which have been on static defense missions must be retrained. Facilities for such retraining exist and it is being programmed.
- (3) Very little training and arming of hamlet militia has been accomplished since 1 Nov due reevaluation entire program and wholesale changes in province chiefs. Prospects for progress in the positioning of effective defenders for hamlets is good.
- (4) JGS is ready to inaugurate an eight week training course for militia squad leaders. Program to start soon as criteria for selection of the leaders is agreed upon.
- (5) As reported separately⁴ GVN is conducting negotiations with Hoa Hao who extend through central Delta. GVN hope is that Hoa Hao will extend ranks of the CG, SDC, border surveillance units and contribute more effective hamlet militia. Gen Minh feels that Hoa Hao SF units can be utilized in Camau Peninsula.
- (6) MRC also entertain hopes of rallying Catholics and Cao Dai in Kien Hoa, many of whom live beyond trace of strategic hamlets. Concept is to arm those who are willing to defend their communities against VC.

2.c. While there is no doubt in my mind that the junta as a group are keeping their eyes on Gen Dinh to insure that he does not get out of line, I do not subscribe to the rumor or supposition that they are unable to control him. Report you cite that he blocked the proposed

corps command shift while fairly widely quoted has to my knowledge no valid basis and at this point can only be classified as supposition. Do not believe we should interpose at this time to encourage junta to take action against Dinh. Do feel that his dual responsibilities as III Corps Comdr and Minister of Security are too much for one man and have and will continue to suggest that he be relieved of his responsibilities as III Corps Comdr so that his full efforts may be devoted to his ministerial responsibilities.

- 2.d. In-country efforts toward giving a clearer and more substantial picture of the infiltration situation encompass better utilization and control of border surveillance, mountain scout, strike force and other elements. Believe progress in this area underway incident to consolidation of former CAS supported elements under MACV and delegation by JGS of control all such elements to corps comdrs.

Significant requirement this regard is lifting of current restrictions on cross border aerial photo recce either by in-country or other aircraft to include Cambodia, Laos, and DRV. Lifting of restrictions on use of US personnel in cross border collection operations would help. More direct access to US collection resources SEA would provide for concentration of effort. Proposal for use of attaches this area in preparation. Steps already taken to obtain CAS assistance.

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 71 A 6489, Viet Sensitive. Top Secret; Eyes Only. Also sent to CINCPAC eyes only for Felt.

² Document 340.

³ Not identified.

⁴ Not found.

344. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, December 4, 1963, 2 p.m.

1107. For Harriman from Lodge. Embassy telegram 1103.² The more I think about the proposed conference on Cambodia, as described in Dept's telegrams, the more disastrous I think it would be to the war to help the Republic of Viet-Nam to win and then maintain its independence from Communist aggression. I say this for the following reasons:

1. It is inconceivable to me that a conference like this could do other than foment and encourage the neutralism which is always present in varying degrees here in South Viet-Nam. People here will say: "First there was Laos; now there is Cambodia; tomorrow it will be Viet-Nam." Obviously, any encouragement of neutralism must impair the war effort.
2. If this conference is held, it will be impossible to avoid consideration of all the Southeast Asian questions, including particularly the unification of North and South Viet-Nam. I recognize the wise desire expressed in Deptel to limit conference scope but doubt whether it can be done. And this emphatically is not the time even to discuss the question of unifying North and South Viet-Nam. The present is the time to strengthen the anti-Communist free world character of South Viet-Nam and to seek to detach, as best we can, North Viet-Nam from Communist China—somewhat as Yugoslavia was detached from the Soviet Union. I admit that Yugoslavia was in a better position to be detached than North Viet-Nam is, but this is nonetheless the direction in which we ought to work now—if only as a preparatory stage to something else. It would be most imprudent to consider the unification of North and South Viet-Nam until South Viet-Nam is in a position of superior strength at the conference table and obviously this state of affairs is not now even in sight.
3. The French will be present at the Cambodian conference and this will naturally put them in a position to hamper all of our major policy objectives here which, without a conference, they could not do since they have put no money and no men into the game and are totally without chips. Why we should hand them this juicy favor by putting them into the game I do not see, particularly in light of the fact, as

Dept recognized in Deptel 800,³ French and U.S. policy on divergent paths.

4. An agreement to protect South Viet-Nam's neutralists from infiltration from Cambodia which was actually enforced by an efficacious border Patrol would have merit, but I have seen no serious suggestion that there is even a possibility of this. If there were a possibility of it, a conference would probably not be necessary to bring it about.
5. I am sure the ChiComs support conference as a step toward helping the Viet Cong in South Viet-Nam, even though I realize praiseworthy motives of conference advocates.
6. We should not go into a conference without being clear in our minds as to how we are most likely to come out of it. We should make up our minds what, as an absolute minimum, we must gain from the conference and what, as an absolute minimum, we must avoid. We should then see how many conferees we can count on. All these calculations should precede a decision.
7. Giving our opponents (i.e., ChiComs, et al) an opportunity to open up an attack on our ally (South Viet-Nam) does not seem like a good way to get on with the war.
8. I dislike differing with conference advocates in U.S. Govt for whom I have such a high regard and with whom I usually agree. I recognize there may be things I do not know. But the above is how it looks to me here in Saigon.
9. It looks as though we were at last getting into a good posture here to get some really solid success in the prosecution of the war. We and the Vietnamese have put both blood and treasure into it. Our joint effort here deserves every chance of success.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27-13 CAMB. Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution.

² Document 341.

³ In telegram 800 to Paris, November 15, the Department of State provided the following information:

"It is quite clear French (De Gaulle) and US policy moving along divergent paths Viet-Nam. If French wish, at least initially, to neglect apparently considerable potential influence they might have with new

GVN by non-recognition, that is regrettable. However, since present thrust of French advice to GVN likely to be in direction of neutral 'solution', we see no great loss in delay in resumption Franco-Vietnamese relations." (Department of State, Central Files, POL 16 S VIET)

345. Telegram From the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Felt) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff¹

Honolulu, December 4, 1963, 7 p.m.

DTG 050500Z. Situation in RVN. A. COMUSMACV DTG 040300Z.²

1. I have reviewed ref A and am in general agreement. In certain areas, and para 1 a is a prime example, it is impossible to make an expert judgment at this time.
2. I believe Viet Cong has focus on GVN's state of organizational turmoil and will strive to utmost to exploit the circumstance to its advantage. First, Viet Cong is likely to maintain a high level of armed attacks so as to militarily discredit GVN. Second, there could be attempts by VC, using its own as well as "front elements," to provoke mass agitation. VC goal would be to generate agitation beyond manageable proportions by present government, thus forcing it to take repressive measures to restore order. Politically VC can be expected to try to create situations which will thrust serious challenges before new government while at the same time putting military pressure on it.
3. Militarily, VC antiaircraft firepower is growing.
4. A major problem before GVN is to reduce flow of VC materiel coming in from out of country sources. Assets listed in para 2d of ref A have had limited success in North but have been ineffectual in South. More strict control of Mekong and other waterways should be a priority objective. In view of present difficulties with Cambodia, there is no prospect of achieving control through political means and Cambodian/RVN cooperation. VC materiel infiltration by SEA into Cau Mau Peninsula deserves further attention.
5. In respect to border surveillance command and control consolidation under corps commands, two considerations apply:
 - a. Where there are ARVN units operating with CIDG units in an area on a regular basis, control should rest with the corps commander.
 - b. Where ARVN units are not operating with CIDG on a regular basis, following should be considered:
 - (1) Central operational control by special operational group (MACV, JGS, CAS) from Saigon.
 - (2) Provision for lateral liaison by CIDG/USAF (P)V at corps level for emergency assistance, logistics support, or coordinated operations to include relief operations and air strikes.

- c. In both a and b situations provision should be made for rapid transmission of CIDG intelligence to corps commanders to enable them to take rapid action against VC whenever possible.
- 6. CAS reports on the Laos/RVN cross border patrols have not contained much info on locations of VC crossing points or any evidence of DRV support sites in Laos. I would attribute most of this failure to secure results to a lack of aggressiveness on the part of the patrol leaders. US advisors should be permitted to accompany the patrols for a certain distance into Laos and without continuous referral for approval to higher headquarters. Cross border patrols can only carry so much weight through the difficult terrain. If they are to make penetrations to adequate depths and to remain on site for observation purposes, they need to be resupplied by air. Walking around that part of the world takes time and observation can be extremely limited. We need tactical air recce to locate the most likely areas of VC activity that can then be thoroughly checked out and interdicted by ground units. Cold Tale photography of DRV and Laos are being run regularly. This photography and Able Mable photos of Laos give acceptable coverage of static installations and LOCs and are usable for planning operations. Wash DC restrictions prevent current use of US A/C for low-level time-sensitive tactical photography. Requirements for coverage of Cambodia can be included in Cold Tale missions.

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 71-A-6489, Viet Sensitive. Top Secret; Routine. Repeated for information to the White House eyes only for Bundy; to the Department of State eyes only for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman; and to the CIA for McCone and Helms. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET, and Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Vietnam Cables) Also published in *Declassified Documents*, 1976, 250D.

² Document 343.

346. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between
the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs
(Harriman) and the President's Special Assistant for
National Security Affairs (Bundy)¹

Washington, December 4, 1963—10:40 p.m.

[Here follows discussion of matters unrelated to Vietnam.]

Bundy wanted the Gov to know that the President sent a memo to the Secretary² saying how strongly he feels about getting a first-rate deputy for Lodge.

Harriman mentioned Nes.

Bundy said he got the Gov's memo of conversation with Lodge.³

Harriman said he rather agreed with Lodge about the military. Harriman said he was told Nes is a very good man—it is between Nes and Anschuetz.

Bill thinks of the two, Nes is the better. Harriman said he talked to Yost. Yost said he was good with military problems and confirmed what Lodge said about Libya. Harriman said Bill said what happened when he was there that caused confusion is that Lodge was taking things into his own hands. Harriman said if Lodge wants Nes, Nes is the best man to do the job. Harriman said he wouldn't support Nes unless he had satisfactory reports. A DCM job is an awful job to take. Nes would have the advantage of being Lodge's choice.

Bundy said Lodge didn't distinguish himself in his interview with the President. Bundy said he thought he was nervous. He thought Lodge may know that the President never thought much of him.

Harriman said it is too bad.

Bundy said he doesn't have the operation going.

Harriman said he was concerned about it. Harriman said he hoped Bundy wouldn't blame Trueheart.

Bundy said he had a high opinion of Trueheart. In the context of the circumstances everybody thought it was better to have a change.

[Here follows discussion unrelated to Vietnam.]

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Dolores Perruso of Harriman's staff.

² Not found.

³ A memorandum from Harriman to Bundy, December 3, describes the Harriman-Lodge discussion as follows:

"I am attaching a copy of a memorandum of my personal talk with Cabot Lodge, which for obvious reasons I am not distributing.

"You may want to show the President the last paragraph which relates to Cabot's personal political thoughts. (Sounds as if Cabot doesn't think much of the Republican chances next year.)" (Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Bundy, McGeorge)

The memorandum of conversation between Lodge and Harriman has not been found.

347. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State
for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) to the Secretary of
State¹

Washington, December 5, 1963.

SUBJECT
Viet-Nam

Attached is a draft Memorandum to the President on the status of actions under National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 273,² and action recommendations for additional measures to win the war.

This draft will be the basis of discussion at the meeting in the Department of State at 3 p.m., December 6, 1963.

It is not intended, at this stage, any of the agencies concerned to the precise views stated, although staff consultation has taken place.

Attachment

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

The following actions have been taken pursuant to specified paragraphs of NSAM 273.

Paragraph 5. Action to place military emphasis on the Delta was begun based on findings of the McNamara-Taylor mission. An additional Vietnamese Division was shifted to the Delta. Since then, directives have been issued to COMUSMACV to implement an increase in military tempo, improve tactics, maintenance of full strength in combat elements, training and arming of hamlet militia, and a consolidation of the strategic hamlet program to bring the pace of construction to a level consistent with the Government's capability to provide essential protection and to introduce civic action programs.

Numerous AID actions have been taken designed to increase agricultural production in the Delta. These include an offer to finance a massive grant distribution of fertilizer, expanded grant distribution of pesticides, a program of rice seed multiplication and joint study of possible GVN

policy changes affecting the economy of rice production. Additional action has been taken regarding intensification of the hamlet school program, retention of trained hamlet medics and the furnishing of generators and community radio sets.

Paragraph 6. AID has assured the GVN that, subject to Congressional appropriations, the United States will maintain the level of aid provided in FY'63 to the Diem government. Through the newly established Joint Committee on Economic Policy negotiations with the GVN have begun on desirable changes in GVN economic policies, and is using the leverage of commercial import financing to bring about these changes. [sic] Specifically, AID has proposed to the GVN a program of tax reform and enforcement, the draw-down of GVN exchange reserves up to \$25 million a year, elimination of luxury imports, and measures to increase exports.

The Joint Staff has undertaken to determine the feasibility of establishing required reserve stocks of ammunition in Viet-Nam as US-owned stocks. The Director of Military Assistance is reviewing what immediate action can be taken in the interim period to establish US ammunition stocks in Viet-Nam. Additionally a study is underway to determine if economics can be made in the helicopter program as between MAP and service requirements. It has been determined that CINCPAC has authority to provide GVN forces serviceable, but not necessarily new materiel, and this should result in a reduction of MAP costs.

Paragraph 7. A joint CIA-Defense plan for intensified operations against North Viet-Nam, providing for selective actions of graduated scope and intensity, is being prepared in Saigon and is due in Washington by December 20.

Paragraph 8. It has been agreed between the Department of Defense and CIA that responsibility for support of paramilitary operations into southern Laos would pass from CAS to MACV. With this action a problem in the policy control and clearance of such politically sensitive operations clearly arises. What we do within Laos by such means can effect the viability of Souvanna Phouma's delicately balanced government in Laos as well as, less directly, the strength of Sihanouk's suspicions of US machinations near his borders.

The Country Team in Saigon has suggested that the following arrangement would protect US interests in the matter:

- A. Establish a zone extending up to 50 kilometers into Laos from the border in which operations could be run without individual clearance.
- B. MACV would undertake to inform Ambassador Lodge fully on plans and operations within this zone so that Ambassador Unger in Vientiane and the Department of State could be kept current on these activities.
- C. Plans for operations outside the specified zone would require Washington clearance through both State and military channels.

This arrangement is acceptable to the Department of Defense and to the Central Intelligence Agency. Relevant suggestions by General Harkins include the desirability of cross-border aerial reconnaissance of Laos (as well as Cambodia and North Viet-Nam) and the use of US personnel in cross-border intelligence collection operations. These suggestions are endorsed by Admiral Felt.

The Department of State, recognizing the importance of obtaining all possible intelligence on Viet Minh infiltration routes through Laos, endorses the principle of a controlled increase in cross-border operations into Laos. However, it is unable to accept the Saigon Country Team recommendation on the ground that this fails to provide the close and continuing political guidance and clearance essential to all such operations if the broader interests of the US are to be protected. For this purpose not even the joint approval of the Ambassadors in Saigon and Vientiane is adequate; the broad overview available only in Washington is mandatory. The Department of State, therefore, recommends:

- A. All cross-border operations into Laos be dependent upon clearance by the Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State.
- B. This clearance can be achieved by:
 - (1) Establishing a coordinating group in Saigon headed by an Embassy political officer (POLAD) assisted by one American and one Vietnamese Special Forces adviser.
 - (2) Developing joint US-Vietnamese cross-border plans by a joint border operations center established under respective US and Vietnamese Special Forces command.
 - (3) Plans would be submitted to the POLAD who would clear in the field with the US Embassies in Saigon and Vientiane and get final clearance from Washington.

Paragraph 9. US ability to influence Cambodia has been greatly reduced by Sihanouk's request for termination of US aid and by his continued charges of US complicity in Khmer Serei activities. Efforts to locate the

Khmer Serei transmitters have not yet been conclusive, but they continue. [1 sentence (2 lines) not declassified] Meanwhile, the Cambodians have apparently adopted a less arbitrary attitude toward our aid termination. We have instructed our Ambassador to be forthcoming to the extent Cambodian intentions are sincere and in conformity with our legal requirements and our dignity. The situation has been further complicated by Sihanouk's call for an international conference to guarantee his neutrality. His proposal is directed at Viet-Nam and Thailand and has rendered the chances of Vietnamese initiative to improve relations with Cambodia almost nil. We are now consulting with our allies to help us determine what our response to Sihanouk's proposal should be.

Paragraph 10. MACV has prepared a report⁴ on Hanoi's control and supply of the Viet Cong, which is being forwarded after coordination with the Embassy. On its receipt in Washington it will be studied and a decision will be made whether to send Mr. Jordan again to Viet-Nam or whether enough material is in hand to write this story for publication.

PART II: FURTHER ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS⁵

In addition to actions already taken under National Security Action Memorandum No. 273, November 26, 1963, an inter-agency review of the current situation in Viet-Nam shows additional actions to be desirable. If you concur in the following further actions, they will be cabled to the Ambassador for execution unless he has serious objections.

A. Political

1. Formulation of U.S.-GVN Brain Trust.

Background: General Minh told Ambassador Lodge November 30 that he wants a U.S. team to work with the GVN as a "brain trust."⁶ This is another of several indications that the new government—contrary to the Diem government—is most receptive to U.S. advice. We must, however, continue to be discreet about the manner of giving advice to avoid a basis for charges that the new government is our puppet.

Recommendations:

- a) That Embassy Saigon actively follow up General Minh's invitation, creating whatever type of advisory arrangement the Embassy and the GVN deem most suitable.

- b) That Washington offer to furnish for permanent or TDY assignment any personnel U.S. agencies in Saigon or the GVN considers required for this purpose.

2. Acceleration of a Modified Strategic Hamlet Program.

Background: The new GVN has decided to concentrate on the improvement of existing strategic hamlets to insure that they serve the purposes for which they were created. The economic development phase of the strategic hamlet program has just been placed in a new Commissariat General for a New Rural Life attached to the Premier's office. The security phase is presumably a responsibility of the Ministry of National Defense. Coordination is presumably handled by the cabinet at national level and by provincial and lower officials at local levels.

On the U.S. side a Committee on Provincial Rehabilitation serves as a U.S. coordinating and advisory organ on the strategic hamlet program.

Recommendations:

- a) That Embassy Saigon explore with the GVN the adequacy of GVN machinery to coordinate the counter-insurgency program (military clear-and-hold operations and the strategic hamlet program) nationwide and to establish priorities for the assignment of economic and military resources to this program.
- b) That U.S. officials in Saigon urge the GVN to push ahead with all deliberate speed on consolidating existing strategic hamlets on a phased basis from more secure to less secure areas.
- c) That the GVN be urged to continue the construction of new strategic hamlets if there are relatively secure zones where they are needed

3. Revival and Revitalization of the Amnesty Program.

Background: The Diem regime inaugurated a limited amnesty program for Viet Cong in January, 1963, which left persons surrendering in considerable doubt as to their future prospects. While the Diem Government's claim that 15,000 had surrendered under this program is probably grossly exaggerated, a well-devised amnesty program is a vital part of a counter-insurgency program. The new government has concentrated important efforts on gaining the support of the dissident Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects (numbering millions in the Mekong Delta), but has had no time to devote to the program of amnesty for Viet Cong.

Recommendations:

- a) That Embassy Saigon urge early GVN attention to a revitalized amnesty program with forgiveness, for example, to all who served in the Viet Cong prior to the November 1 coup and who surrender by a certain date.
- b) That land redistribution and vocational training be incorporated in the amnesty program.
- c) That the program be given maximum publicity.

4. Revival and Revitalization of Land Programs.

Background: The Diem Government instituted both land rental contract and land redistribution programs. The first never received adequate emphasis, and the second virtually lapsed with the spread of the guerrilla war. The former limited rents to 25 percent of the crop. Under the second program the GVN bought the land from landlords and sold it on an installment basis to peasants. (The Communists, of course, gave away land they expropriated.) The GVN still holds undistributed about 625,000 acres of land bought from French landowners.

Recommendation:

- a) That the new GVN, as an important means of attracting peasant support, revitalize the land rental contract and land redistribution programs, and establish the easiest possible terms for the latter consistent with the government's budgetary problems.

5. Encouragement of Treatment of Peasants With Social Justice.

Background: Under the old regime the peasants were constantly pushed around because of the pressure on provincial and lower officials to meet the central government's desires or to impress Saigon. The completely different attitude of the new government is shown by its prompt discontinuation of forced labor on projects which do not directly benefit the peasant. Despite the good effect of this exemplary attitude at the top, the tendency among officials in non-democratic Oriental states is to push the people around, and the new regime will have to be prepared to deal swiftly and justly with officials displaying the old approach.

Recommendation:

a) That Embassy Saigon encourage the new GVN at every appropriate opportunity to maintain special diligence about official treatment of the peasants with consideration, respect, and justice.

6. Establishment of a Domestic Peace Corps.

Background: Shortly after the coup General Minh directed that a student who suggested direct urban participation in the improvement of rural life be asked to set up a "domestic Peace Corps" for this purpose. Nothing more has been heard of this, but it seems to be a laudable idea for establishing the links now missing between the urban intelligentsia and the rural masses and for giving the former an opportunity for direct participation in the war effort.

Recommendation:

a) That Embassy Saigon follow up this idea with the GVN and encourage its implementation.

7. Development of Additional Political Action Techniques.

Background: To further strengthen the political will of the population against the Viet Cong assaults, a political action campaign should be mounted to give the people vehicles for expression of their interests. These vehicles should, to the maximum possible extent, be non-governmental in order to enable the people to use them to represent their interests vis-a-vis the government. This political action campaign should use existing organizations wherever possible, but new ones may need to be established with covert and overt U.S. and GVN assistance.

The Tenant Farmers Union, an affiliate of Viet-Nam's largest labor confederation, is the best example of an existing organization which might be revitalized. Reaching its peak effectiveness in 1959 with a claimed membership of 300,000, it supported the GVN's land reform program on the local level, organized cooperatives and distributed fertilizer at cost. It lost momentum because of Diem/Nhu mistrust of it as a private organization, but still has a skeleton organization which could probably be expanded.

Recommendations:

a) That Embassy Saigon sound out the generals about revitalization of the Tenant Farmers Union and its use for indirectly attracting peasant

support to the government.

- b) That the Country Team study the desirability of seeking to establish additional organizations for the purpose of building anti-Communist political strength, and recommend a U.S. program of action.

8. Improved Treatment of the Mountain Tribespeople.

Background: Approximately 600,000 of South Viet-Nam's population of 14.5 million belong to one of a large number of mountain tribes. These people, culturally distinct from the ethnic Vietnamese, have long been subject to discriminatory treatment by the Vietnamese and have been particularly subject to clever exploitation by the Communists. Some improvement has, however, taken place in South Vietnamese attitudes and practices toward the Montagnards since 1961.

Recommendations:

- a) That an intensive U.S.-GVN study of the land tenure situation in Montagnard areas be proposed to the GVN with a view to providing the Montagnards with some form of title to ancestral lands.
- b) That the GVN be urged to increase Montagnard educational facilities at the village and provincial levels.
- c) That U.S. officials emphasize on every possible occasion to responsible GVN officials the importance of improved attitudes toward the Montagnards.

9. Dissipation of Rumors About Arbitrary Police Methods.

Background: News stories are appearing of a repetition of arbitrary police methods by the new government. Continuation of such reports will damage the regime's international reputation and harm its domestic political standing.

Recommendations:

- a) That the new government issue a prompt and comprehensive public statement listing all non-Communists detained, the reasons for their detention and the expected disposition of the cases.
- b) That the new regime be urged either to try or to remove Ngo Dinh Can expeditiously from Viet-Nam.

10. Neutralization of General Ton That Dinh

Background: Dinh, emotional and ambitious, is the potential Nasser among the generals. Not only is he Minister of Public Security and a frequent, if self-appointed, spokesman for the new government, but he retains command of the III Corps around Saigon and the Commander of the IV Corps in the Mekong Delta is believed close to him.

Recommendation:

a) That Embassy Saigon be urged to seek and use any feasible and appropriate means for neutralizing Dinh, such as separating him from his troop command on the ground that this job plus his ministry are too much for one man.

11. Improvement of Vietnamese-Cambodian Relations.

Background: Immediately following the coup prospects for improved Vietnamese-Cambodian relations appeared favorable. Despite Sihanouk's laying down five difficult conditions for resumption of relations with the GVN, the latter sent their former representative to Phnom Penh on a personal mission. This might have borne fruit if coup rumors against Sihanouk had not emanated from Saigon causing Sihanouk to refuse further attempts. Since then further Sihanouk accusations against the GVN and suggestions of neutralization and subsequent confederation with Cambodia have reduced hopes for improvement almost to the vanishing point. The outlook is further clouded by Sihanouk's demand for Cambodian neutrality being internationally guaranteed through a conference of the Geneva Powers. GVN considers Sihanouk's proposal highly unnecessary and beamed primarily at Viet-Nam and Thailand. The GVN will be suspicious of any U.S. pressure (and it would have to be heavy) on the GVN to participate in such a conference.

The Vietnamese-Cambodian border remains a sore point. There is no doubt the Viet Cong make use of Cambodia both as refuge and infiltration route and as a way to smuggle in supplies for their SVN operations. General Harkins has proposed: (a) photo reconnaissance flights on the Cambodian side of the border, (b) clandestine intelligence operations across the border into Cambodia, (c) institution of a "hot pursuit" policy, and (d) rigid inspection and control of the Cambodian use of the Mekong.

Recommendations:

- a) That the GVN should be urged to continue to exercise restraint vis-a-vis Cambodia and to seize the initiative in making concrete proposals. The latter should be such that if accepted they would result in demonstrable improvement in relations and if refused would put Sihanouk on the spot as being the one who rejected generous and practical offers of reconciliation, thus indicating he really did not desire normal relations. Silencing of the Khmer Serei radio and cessation of any GVN support therefore is an obvious step for the GVN.
- b) That General Harkins' fourth proposal be approved, but the first three deferred at present because of the likelihood they would drive Sihanouk still closer to Communist China. They can be reconsidered if Sihanouk fails to agree to reasonable GVN proposals for settlement of their problems and cooperation about the border.

12. Improvement of Relations With Laos.

Background: At the present time embassies are maintained in Saigon and Vientiane headed by Charges whose actual diplomatic status is purposely left ambiguous. Work is carried on but not at the desired level. Souvanna has so far refused to accept a GVN ambassador or even to grant formal recognition to the new regime. He claims the former will require tripartite approval by the three sections and the latter must await indications that the new regime has full popular support. At the same time, Vietnamese contact with the right wing faction in Laos (General Phoumi) on military matters continues and there are repeated reports of a meeting about to take place. Regardless of the state of diplomatic relations, close cooperation between the two military sides is important for the operations we wish to see conducted in the corridor.

Recommendation:

- 1) We should not hesitate to urge, when possible, both countries to resume full diplomatic relations and to cooperate militarily. Border cooperation is essential; however, purely military relations should not be carried out without the knowledge of Souvanna.

13. Relations With Other Countries.

Background: Improvement of relations with Thailand appear not only desirable, but possible. Malaysia and the Philippines offer good prospects. It is important that the GVN not just give lip service to their declaration for a desire for friendly relations, but actively pursue them, particularly

in Asia. The importance of this in the receipt of third country economic and technical assistance is obvious. However, internal matters should take precedence and the reported visit of General Don to nearby countries at this time is questionable.

Recommendations:

- 1) We should endeavor where possible to foster good international relations of the GVN. This is particularly important in Asia to avoid the isolation which was increasing under Diem.
- 2) An effective Vietnamese spokesman at the UN would help greatly both in presenting the GVN side of the war and refuting Communist Bloc propaganda against it. Generally, the quality of Vietnamese representation abroad should be improved.

B. Intelligence

Background: The current volume, accuracy and timeliness of intelligence concerning Viet Cong capabilities, strengths, sources of personnel and supplies, actions and plans are not adequate to serve as a basis for political action or for military planning and operations. Evidence of infiltration is meager while the effectiveness of recent operations suggests that the actual level of personnel and material infiltration may have been seriously underestimated. We also have inadequate data on the reasons motivating the entry into the Viet Cong of such large numbers of people from South Viet-Nam.

Recommendations:

- 1) That the National Security Agency be requested to adjust its priorities of effort and allocations of personnel and material, both in Washington and Viet-Nam, as required to break Viet Cong communication codes.
- 2) That Embassies Saigon, Phnom Penh and Vientiane be directed to develop a combined intelligence acquisition plan designed to produce reliable and timely information concerning the Viet Cong use of the territory of Cambodia and Laos. A directed [direct] feature of this plan should be to assign Embassy Saigon overall responsibility for the coordination of U.S. agency efforts in this regard.
- 3) That the U.S. agencies in Saigon, in coordination with the GVN, develop improved prisoner interrogation procedures to produce a rapid and voluminous flow of intelligence on Viet Cong infiltration and on local recruitment in South Viet-Nam (including numbers and motivation).

- 4) In order to assure the availability of presently unreported, but useful overt information, the Country Team should communicate requirements on a continuing basis to all operating staff, and impress them with the need for greater reporting consciousness.
- 5) To coordinate the covert and overt collection processes, the Ambassador may wish to appoint a senior official full time for this purpose.

C. Military

Background: Notwithstanding the considerable improvement in the Vietnamese military posture and the newly evident inclination of the Vietnamese to respond more effectively to U.S. military advice, operational, training and conceptual deficiencies still exist.

Recommendations:

- 1) Combat troops should be employed to their maximum capacity in the performance of combat missions. The average RVN AF Battalion (130 total) is engaged in combat missions on 10-15 days of each month. Our objective is 20 days per month of effective operations for all combat forces.
- 2) The numerous under-manned and non-effective outposts in remote areas are a drain on available military manpower and constitute vulnerable targets for Viet Cong attack. Action to disband unneeded posts and consolidate others in larger and more effective installations is now under way. It must be accelerated.
- 3) The Vietnamese have thus far failed to assign sufficient numbers of highly qualified Special Forces personnel for counterpart training with our own Special Forces. More emphasis on this program may be needed.
- 4) The shift of military emphasis to the Delta has been proceeding at a slow pace. It probably should be accelerated. The best available Vietnamese military commanders have not yet been assigned to the Delta, although there is steady progress in this direction.
- 5) Terrain sweeps, which often fail to inflict casualties upon the Viet Cong forces and contribute little toward consolidating control over areas involved, continue to divert a considerable proportion of the total Vietnamese offensive resources. These ineffectual sweeps are steadily being replaced by the more effective "clear and hold" operations. The process should be accelerated. Specifically there should be an increase in protracted combat patrolling, in which air-supplied patrols remain in the field for periods of several weeks, relying upon ground

controlled, quickly responsive direct air support as a major element of their combat power.

- 6) Concurrent with the consolidation of the strategic hamlet program, particularly in the Delta, the companion program of arming and training an effective hamlet militia requires refinement and invigoration.
- 7) Manning levels of combat units remain too low. Pressure must be maintained to persuade Vietnamese authorities to bring these units to full strength.
- 8) Improvement of Vietnamese capabilities for combined air-sea-ground operations is required.
- 9) More use should be made of the sea for tactical maneuver. There is also a requirement to increase river operations, in order to deny the Viet Cong these avenues of resupply and secure them for the transportation of essential GVN supplies.

D. Economic

Background: Additional actions beyond those already taken are necessary to assure that the GVN has the necessary resources for the counter-insurgency program, and takes effective action in the economic field to attract the support of the peasants.

Recommendations:

- 1) That an economic expert, with a recognized independent reputation and capable of establishing rapport with the GVN-e.g. Eugene Staley (who led a similar special mission in 1961), be recruited immediately to conduct delicate and difficult negotiations with the GVN designed to produce the resources necessary for counter-insurgency. Measures to be negotiated with the GVN include:
 - a. Improve tax enforcement and compliance.
 - b. Increase the productivity of the tax system.
 - c. Reduce commercial credit (other than credit for export and agriculture).
 - d. Develop institutions and instruments to mobilize voluntary savings.
 - e. Draw down exchange reserves by \$20-25 million a year.
 - f. Eliminate import subsidies of about 300 million piasters (principally on milk and cotton).
 - g. Reduce non-counter-insurgency operating expenditure especially construction and subsidies to government corporations.
 - h. Hold government investment expenditures to one billion piasters.

- i. Tighten the import program to eliminate the bulk of financing of luxury items.
 - j. Auction limited amount of foreign exchange for luxuries.
 - k. Increase exports through a variety of specified measures.
 - l. Lift price and other restrictions on production and use of agricultural forestry and fisheries products.
 - m. Establish a country-wide price support policy for major agricultural crops.
 - n. Expand agricultural credit facilities.
2. That Embassy and AID Saigon continue to urge the GVN to streamline its administrative procedures to bring about a more rapid flow of funds to the provinces, decentralize responsibility and control of resources and assign more effective civil personnel to the Mekong Delta.
 3. That Embassy and AID Saigon continue to urge the GVN to assign a qualified deputy to each province chief, with priority to the Mekong Delta, responsible for administering the economic and political aspects of the strategic hamlet program.
 4. That AID Saigon and MACV urge the GVN to reactivate its dormant program of military civic action, with emphasis on the Mekong Delta.

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Memos and Misc. Top Secret. Sent also to the Secretary of Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, and the Administrator of the Agency for International Development.

² Document 331.

⁴ Not found.

⁵ There is no "Part 1". The source text begins with page 1; presumably this document is the second part of the attachment.

⁶ See [Document 334](#).

348. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Taylor) to President Johnson¹

Washington, December 6, 1963.

CM-1065-63

SUBJECT

Assignment of Personnel to South Vietnam

The Joint Chiefs of Staff are completely in accord with the view expressed in your memorandum of December 2, 1963² that South Vietnam is our most critical military area at the moment. In recognition of this priority, they have undertaken to see to it that General Harkins receives the best officers available in each of the areas of military activity represented in his command.

Since receiving your memorandum of 2 December 1963, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have conveyed its content to Admiral Felt and General Harkins, asking them to report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff whether the policy expressed therein is being presently carried out to their satisfaction.³ If such is not the case, now or in the future, they are to report the facts at once to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Maxwell D. Taylor

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Memos and Misc. Secret.

² Document 337.

³ See [Document 340](#).

349. Memorandum From the Chairman of the Central Intelligence Agency's Working Group on Vietnam (Cooper) to the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone)¹

Washington, December 6, 1963.

SUBJECT
South Vietnam—Where We Stand

Summary

1. The change of government in Saigon has provided an opportunity to generate greater popular support and momentum for the war effort against the Viet Cong. The government, however, is already running into snags in organizing itself for this task. Even in the best of circumstances, a satisfactory reduction of the Communist insurgency will be a long and arduous process given the tenacity and strong position of the Viet Cong in many areas.

The New Government

2. With the exception of Diem's assassination, the generals who have seized power in Saigon have created an initially favorable impression by their prompt release of political prisoners of the old regime, their removal of restrictions on individual rights and on the press, and by their promise to return power eventually to civilian control.

3. They have moved quickly to try to win support from significant groups and individuals estranged from the Diem regime. Talks have been opened with leaders of the politico-religious Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects—which together have up to 2 million adherents, including several thousand in loosely organized armed bands. Support from the sects could lead to improved security in some critical provinces of the delta and adjacent to Cambodia where the sects have wide popular allegiance.

4. Various prominent exiles abroad have been welcomed back and encouraged, along with persons in South Vietnam who had been jailed or otherwise barred from political life under Diem, to organize and express their ideas openly.

5. The generals have voiced their determination to pursue the fight against the Viet Cong, and appear to view realistically the serious problems involved.
6. Despite encouraging elements in the picture, there are danger signs. The most serious is the absence of firm direction and of a well-defined program of action. There is a real danger that the situation may be allowed to drift indefinitely.
7. The possible ambitions of some of the generals are a source of concern to the others. Concern extends particularly to generals occupying positions in security, police, intelligence and psychological warfare functions where efforts to develop independent power bases of political power could weaken vital areas of the war effort.
8. Many of Diem's former officials and associates are under arrest or investigation, and the generals are under pressure from elements of the public as well as within their own ranks to purge remnants of the Diem regime. There is danger that a vendetta, or the impression of a vendetta, may be created.
9. Not all appointments among the extensive personnel shifts underway in the administration and armed forces promise improvement. We lack the capability to assess the impact of personnel changes at lower echelons, particularly among district chiefs who play vital roles in rural counterinsurgency.
10. The selection of Nguyen Ngoc Tho, Diem's vice president, as premier is resented by many Vietnamese who claim he is weak, without firm principles, and regional in his outlook. Civilian members of Tho's cabinet, who are predominantly native southerners, are technically competent but lack the political and administrative skills to shape policies or influence the military.
11. Disagreements have emerged over the composition and role of the Council of Notables which is to serve as a vehicle for harnessing civilian talents. Prominent politicians, who feel it may be used to forge them into an artificial two-party system, are still "fence-sitting" as in the past.
12. Although there is no evidence of anti-government motivation in three post-coup self-immolations in Saigon, the suicides may reflect continued public unrest, stemming from unfulfilled, if undefined, expectations. Such

an atmosphere would increase pressure on the government to produce some tangible or dramatic sign of progress.

Military Situation

13. The prolonged political crisis in Saigon has tended to obscure a gradual intensification of Viet Cong guerrilla activity since mid-1963 reaching record peaks since the coup. After a period of readjustment of their political and military effort to meet the challenge of stepped-up US-Vietnamese counter-insurgency programs, the Communist drive by the time of the coup had regained momentum and was approaching levels of activity sustained prior to the increased US intervention.

14. This renewed activity appears to be somewhat more effective than previously. The Communists have been inflicting increased casualties and weapons losses on government forces at no apparent increase in cost to themselves. They have accomplished this by changing their tactics and reducing their vulnerability to government countermeasures. They have concentrated their attacks on "soft" targets-strategic hamlets and outposts manned by paramilitary elements. They have also improved their defensive capabilities against government ground and air attack.

15. Although the Viet Cong continue to suffer heavy combat losses, they appear to have access to sufficient manpower to more than replace these losses. Their armed strength is now conservatively estimated at 80,000 to 100,000 men, including at least 21,000 to 23,000 well-trained regulars.

16. At the same time, the Communists have continued to develop larger and better-equipped tactical units, including some regimental organizations. These growing capabilities have been made possible by support from Hanoi in the form of cadre personnel and weapons. The infiltration of about 800 cadre personnel this year has been more or less confirmed, but there are indications that this figure is only a fraction of the actual total, which may equal or even exceed the 3,000 or so estimated to have arrived from North Vietnam last year.

17. Increasing numbers of Bloc-manufactured weapons are being captured in South Vietnam. Some of these are brought in through Laos and others through Cambodia. The Viet Cong, however, continue to rely primarily on captured weapons. Their net gain of 2,700 captured weapons since May is sufficient to arm about seven new regular battalions, up to 30 district companies, or more than 100 local guerrilla platoons.

18. The renewed Viet Cong effort developed even as the government's vigorous counterinsurgency programs began to have effect last year. The strength of the government's armed forces has been increased to some 500,000 men. These include more than 215,000 in the regular armed forces, 83,000 in the Civil Guard, and over 200,000 in other paramilitary elements such as Self-Defense Corps, Hamlet Militia, and Citizen's Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG). The government has a significant advantage in the quality and mobility of weapons, and a monopoly on air support.

19. By stepping up the tempo of its tactical operations, the government has probably retarded the development of the guerrilla forces and deprived them of the initiative in some areas. The government has followed through on other measures to improve its military posture, notably in expanding and training the paramilitary forces. New tactics, emphasizing ambushes and night patrols, have been instituted. Psychological operations have been increased, with emphasis on the Chieu Hoi "returnee" program aimed at winning over Viet Cong adherents. The government has revised its territorial command structure, deploying the 9th Division from central Vietnam to the guerrilla-infested Mekong delta.

20. The strategic hamlet program, cornerstone of the Diem regime's counterinsurgency effort, is now alleged by government officials to cover 77 percent of the rural population. The Viet Cong have refocused their effort to counter the strategic hamlet program, which in some areas is overextended. Some hamlets are not secure against either attack or infiltration, and offer their inhabitants few benefits. Some hamlet defenders have fought well but about one-third of the hamlet militia has not been armed because of suspicions concerning their loyalties.

21. The strategic hamlet program has been most successful in the northern coastal provinces, where minimal resettlement was necessary and its establishment was integrated with military clear-and-hold operations. Even here, however, field evaluations indicate that only about half the hamlets are fully effective.

22. In the highlands area, the strategic hamlets have been complemented by the CIDG program. These paramilitary units have been relatively effective in patrolling their areas, restricting Viet Cong movements and reducing their access to the tribal minority people (montagnard) for food and other supplies. The success of this effort apparently has been heavily dependent on direct US participation, and setbacks have occurred in

some cases after the withdrawal of US special forces teams. Similar problems have been encountered with the montagnard resettlement program, and seem to arise from an overly paternalistic approach by US advisers, coupled with a lack of understanding and sympathy for the montagnards among Vietnamese functionaries.

23. The situation remains most critical in the Mekong delta provinces south of Saigon—the most densely populated area in South Vietnam—and in the provinces just north of Saigon. Here the Communists have base areas of long standing, which government forces seldom penetrate. Food is not a problem, and the nearby border with Cambodia affords safe havens. The strategic hamlet program has been least successful in this region, where traditional population patterns necessitate a great deal of relocation, and where effective coordination of military operations with hamlet construction has been lacking. Hundreds of strategic hamlets have been attacked and harassed by the Viet Cong in this region, and the program is being revised to stress consolidation rather than expansion.

24. The particularly intensified Viet Cong activity since the coup appears designed as much for psychological impact and for testing the new regime as for military advantage. It has been characterized by widespread, small-scale actions against hamlets and outposts, punctuated occasionally by larger-scale attacks against more substantial posts or military training camps. The Communists apparently hope to encourage internal strains in the new regime until its leadership bogs down and the war-weary South Vietnamese and US public become receptive to a negotiated solution. Both the Viet Cong's Liberation Front and Hanoi have, since the coup, revived proposals for a “neutralized” South Vietnam.

25. Although the new government moved relatively quickly from execution of the coup in Saigon to sustain the military operations against the Viet Cong, there have been at least some dislocations in rural counterinsurgency programs as a result of the coup itself and the subsequent personnel changes.

Chester L. Cooper²

¹ Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, POL 1, General Political. Secret/Sensitive; Eyes Only.

² Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature and an indication that the original was signed.

350. Editorial Note

On December 6, 1963, Rusk, McNamara, Taylor, McCone, Bell, Wilson, Colby, McGeorge and William Bundy, U. Alexis Johnson, Koren, and Hilsman met in a conference room at the White House to discuss Vietnam. The meeting lasted from 3:10 to approximately 4:30 p.m. Shortly after the meeting began, Ball joined the group. (Johnson Library, Rusk Appointment Book) No memorandum of the discussion has been found, but the gist of the meeting and the resulting recommendations are described in [Document 351](#). In a memorandum to Krulak, December 12, Hilsman stated: "as a result of the Cabinet level meeting at the Department of State on December 6, 1963, a number of actions regarding Vietnam have been set in motion. We are not at this time prepared to go to the President for a decision on any of these matters. Nevertheless we feel that an interim report to the President telling him where we stand with respect to the actions directed under NSC [NSAM] 243 is required." Hilsman's draft interim report to the President included the recommendations set forth in Document 351 and used as a basis the two parts to the attachment to [Document 347](#). There is no indication that this memorandum by Hilsman of December 12 with its annexes was passed to the President but an undated copy is in Johnson Library, National Security File, National Security Council Series, NSAM 273, South Vietnam.

351. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, December 6, 1963—10:29 p.m.

908. For Lodge from the Secretary.

1. The President has expressed his deep concern that our effort in Vietnam be stepped up to highest pitch and that each day we ask ourselves what more we can do to further the struggle.
2. We have accordingly instituted an all-agency review of the situation and of activities and programs and how they might be improved, looking towards a meeting with the President sometime next week.
3. At preliminary high-level interdepartmental meeting today DOD presented disturbing analysis of the current military situation, with the following conclusions:
 - a. The GVN desires to respond to US military advice and to improve its operational effectiveness. It has the capability to do so and its plans are basically sound, but it is in a state of organizational turmoil.
 - b. The VC are making an intensive effort to increase their hold on the countryside while the new government is shaking down.
 - c. The VC have exhibited a powerful capability for at least a brief period of intensified operations, and their skill in counter-airborne operations is improving.
 - d. There is ground for concern that infiltration of materiel has increased, but little hard proof. This is a prime intelligence deficiency. It affects not only military tactics but our over-all Southeast Asia strategy.
4. The conclusions were based on these factors:
 - a. VC incidents have increased greatly since the coup, going as high as 1,000 in one week. While presently decreasing, the post-coup average is still above the 1962 average (363 per week) and the average for the first half of 1963 (266 per week).
 - b. The great preponderance of incidents are in the III and IV Corps zones.
 - c. GVN weapons losses have increased greatly since the coup, and exceed by a considerable measure the 1962 weekly loss average (99) as well as the first half 1963 weekly average (116).

- d. VC weapons captured have not shown a corresponding increase, with the result that the weapons loss ratio has grown more unfavorable to the GVN since the coup.
 - e. The VC appear, despite heavy casualties, still to be able to maintain their hard core strength.
 - f. The numerous changes in GVN division and corps boundaries, changes in major commanders, in sector commanders and district chiefs have all united to cause organizational turmoil, and to provide an inviting opportunity for VC action.
 - g. VC activities, such as that which resulted in the damage of twenty aircraft on 24 November, exhibit a growing enemy anti-aircraft capability. This is reinforced by the recent capture of AA weapons and related equipment of possible Russian or Chinese design.
 - h. Additionally, the continued appearance of recoilless rifles and ammunition, of apparent Chinese design, as well as new Chinese rifles in the Delta raises the question of the possibility of increased infiltration.
 - i. Disquiet has been expressed by both COMUSMACV and CINCPAC regarding the possibility of increased infiltration, and has resulted in recommendations for relaxation of various restrictions related to border patrol and surveillance activities.
5. The foregoing presentation, although acknowledged to cover a brief period, was viewed as possibly indicative of a protracted intensification of VC effort, as well as suggesting the possibility of increased outside aid, both of which might seriously derange our prospects for the future. Your comments are requested on the factors outlined above as well as on the conclusions.
6. To meet situation described in briefing, DOD made four suggestions, as follows:
- a. Institute program of pressures in NVN of rising intensity.
 - b. Institute probes into Laos, including use of US advisers and air resupply.
 - c. Institute aerial recon of both Cambodia and Laos.
 - d. Accelerate dispatch of US economic experts to SVN.
7. After discussion, following was agreed:
- a. To expedite for further consideration plans for phased operations against NVN.
 - b. Institute analysis of waterborne traffic into Viet-Nam and develop plans to interrupt infiltration by this means.
 - c. Develop for further consideration detailed plans for probes into Laos including aerial recon over Laos and Cambodia.
 - d. Assessment of political consequences of "c" above including what must be done covertly and what Lao Government might agree to

- e. Expedite high-level economic expert to assist you in economic negotiations with GVN.
- f. Give you herewith authority to respond favorably and immediately to Minh's proposal for "braintrust". We visualize this as creating any type of close advisory arrangement you deem appropriate and agreeable to GVN.
- g. Sending William Jordan shortly to Saigon with a mission of examining evidence to support new report re-emphasizing Hanoi's control and support of VC.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15 S VIET-US. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. Drafted by Hilsman and cleared in draft with Rusk, in substance with Krulak, and with Bromley Smith. Repeated to CINCPAC eyes only for Felt. Also published in *Declassified Documents*, 1975, 212D.

352. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, December 7, 1963, midnight.

1122. Herewith report of USOM provincial representative Young² on Long An Province as of December 6.

"1. The only progress made in Long An Province during month of November 1963 has been by the Communist Viet Cong. The past thirty days have produced a day-by-day elimination of US/ Vietnamese sponsored strategic hamlets and the marked increase in Viet Cong influence, military operations, physical control of the country-side and Communist controlled combat hamlets.

"2. At the end of September 1963 province officials stated that 219 strategic hamlets were completed and met the six criteria. Effective 30 November 1963 this figure has been reduced to about 45 on the best estimates of MAAG, USOM and the new province chief, Major Dao. 27 hamlets were attacked in Nov, compared with the figure of 77 for June. This would appear to be an improvement; however, the explanation is a simple one: so many strategic hamlets have been rendered ineffective by the Viet Cong that only 27 were worth attacking this month.

"3. Of the 219 hamlets containing armed defenders (hamlet militia) in September, 50 remain armed today. The remainder have turned in their weapons or deserted.

"4. The reason for this unhappy situation is the failure of the Govt of Vietnam to support and protect the hamlets. The concept of the strategic hamlet called for a self-defense force capable of holding off enemy attack for a brief period until regular forces (ARVN, Civil Guard, or SDC) could come to the rescue. In hamlet after hamlet this assistance never came, or in most cases, arrived the following morning during daylight hours.

"A few (ten or twelve) half-trained farmers armed with shotguns have neither the experience nor leadership to defend a large hamlet against the efficient guerrilla force, no matter how small. When it became known throughout the province that no help was forthcoming until daylight, the will and desire to resist dropped. From this point even three or four

Viet Cong can—and do—demand entrance to the hamlet and receive it without opposition. The hamlet chiefs murdered, the houses of all relocated families destroyed, the barbed wire fence is cut, and another hamlet is eliminated.

“5. Two explanations are presented for the lack of assistance: A. There are not sufficient troops to protect key installations and district headquarters and at the same time to go to the assistance of the hamlet.

“B. Both official orders and policy prohibit the movement of troops after dark to go to the assistance of hamlets or isolated military posts.

“6. Even today, the order by a Vietnamese military commander to one of his units to remain (not conduct operations, just remain) out over-night is so unusual that it brings marked comments and a faint light of hope to his US MAAG adviser.

“7. What are the implications of this situation to the AID/rural affairs program?

“8. The provincial agreement is tailored in each province to use the strategic hamlet program as its vehicle for improvement of the economic, social and security conditions of the Vietnamese people. Funds are provided for assistance in moving to one hamlet, for training hamlet defenders, for self-help projects to bring schools, medical treatment, agricultural improvement and in general to upgrade the standard of living through the joint efforts of the local population and American assistance. When the Viet Cong have gained control or so terrorized the residents of a hamlet these very worthwhile programs cannot succeed. That is the situation in Long An Province.

“9. The strategic hamlet program in this province can be made workable and very effective against the Viet Cong. But help must come immediately in the form of additional troops and new concepts of operation, not the same re-heated French tactics of 1954 beefed up with more helicopters and tanks. The hamlets must be defended if this province is not to fall under complete control of the Viet Cong in the next several months.

“10. The newly assigned MAAG adviser and the new Province Chief have all the earmarks of intelligent, dedicated and hard-working officers. But they must receive full support or their plans will never leave the conference room.”

11. See also General *Don's* statement to me on Long An,³ notably his statement that totally useless and impractical hamlets were built with forced labor so that grafters would receive the money allocated to strategic hamlets.

12. I am asking MACV and USOM to find out how the above and the scandalous conditions described by General Don escaped inspection.

13. Long An is the province immediately bordering the south of Saigon and its loss could cut off the city's food supply.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26-1 S VIET. Secret; Limit Distribution. *In The Vantage Point*, pp. 62-63, Johnson recalls that Rusk sent him this cable and quotes from paragraph 1.

² Earl J. Young.

³ Reported in telegram 1121 from Saigon, December 7, in which Lodge reported on his discussion with General Don on December 7. The discussion covered South Vietnamese-Cambodian relations, the effect of Sihanouk's neutrality proposal on the war in South Vietnam, and the need for a renewed effort in the war against the Viet Cong. Don mentioned problems with strategic hamlets in Long An and he informed Lodge that there would be a marked improvement in prosecution of the war in January 1964. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET)

353. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, December 7, 1963, 7 p.m.

1123. For Secretary from Lodge.

1. Your 908.²
2. My wire describing my talk with General Don Saturday morning³ responds in part to your wire and shows Generals think they are working at highest pitch. I overlook no opportunity to prod them, although I honestly do not believe they need prodding.
3. I think DOD conclusions your paragraph 3 are sound.
4. Regarding your paragraph 6a I have made detailed suggestion to Harriman.
5. Will of course cooperate to utmost on all points paragraph 7.
6. Basis subsequent talk with Kim, GVN does not appear to have precise ideas re "braintrust". However, we will push idea and further meeting with Kim is planned for early next week.
7. My wire describing my talk with Don and my wire on conditions in Long An Province⁴ make clear that the new government has inherited a mess and we can expect more unpleasant surprises. We realize this and are capitalizing on it to utmost. The Generals are able men and will do big things once they get started, which they think will be in January. But December will be rough.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Top Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. Repeated to CINCPAC exclusive for Felt. Passed to the White House, the CIA, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

² Document 351.

³ See [footnote 3, Document 352](#).

⁴ Document 352.

354. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between
the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense
(McNamara)¹

Washington, December 7, 1963—12:40 p.m.

TELEPHONE CALL FROM McNAMARA

McN. said that while he was seeing the Pres. on economic moves and personnel reduction, he told him that he should stop over in Saigon on the way back and he said he had already mentioned this to the Sec. The Pres. gave McN. quite a lecture on South Viet-Nam and expressed concern that we as a government were not doing everything we should. The Pres. was to make a statement to the press about personnel reductions and at the same time he told the press that McN. was going to Saigon;² this was contrary to what the Sec and McN. had agreed on. McN. said he might comment that this was just one of a series of visits, that he had not made one for 24 months, and that he would stop in Saigon on the way home from the NATO meeting.

¹ Source: Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Francis H. Rawlings of the Office of the Secretary of State.

² McNamara visited Vietnam, December 19-20. President Johnson announced the McNamara visit at a press conference on December 7. For the transcript, see Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-1964, pp. 34-38.

355. Memorandum From Senator Mike Mansfield to President Johnson¹

Washington, December 7, 1963.

SUBJECT

Southeast Asia and Vietnam

Pursuant to our conversation last Thursday night,² attached herewith are memoranda which were sent to President Kennedy over the past years.³ They deal with the Southeast Asian situation and Viet Nam in particular. In addition there is appended a speech of mine of two years ago and a report to the Senate a year ago.⁴ Subsequent events have changed some of the details. But it seems to me that the basic observations and conclusions remain valid. In some specifics, actions of the Executive Branch coincide with these observations and conclusions. In many they do not. In any event, this material may be useful by way of background.

I would add only these thoughts on the present situation:

1. Present policy says that there is a war which can be won in South Viet Nam alone. There may be only a war which will, in time, involve U.S. forces throughout Southeast Asia, and finally throughout China itself in search of victory. What national interests in Asia would steel the American people for the massive costs of an ever-deepening involvement of that kind? It may be that we are confronted with a dilemma not unlike that which faced us in Korea a decade ago. It will be recalled that Mr. Eisenhower's response was not to pursue the war to victory but to go to Korea to make peace, in reality, a truce.
2. Similarly, there may be a truce that could be won now in Viet Nam alone and eventually a peace which might be won throughout Southeast Asia at a price commensurate with American interests. That peace should mean, in the end, a Southeast Asia less dependent on our aid-resources and support, less under our control, not cut off from China but, still, not overwhelmed by China. If there is any opportunity of winning that kind of truce and peace it would appear to involve initially the following actions:
 - a. It would involve an effort to strengthen the hold of the Saigon government on those parts of South Viet Nam which it now controls. What is called for are political and social acts of popular

benefit by the Vietnamese authorities where they can act, even if it means curtailing the present elusive and so far unsuccessful chase of the Viet Cong all over the land.

- b. It would involve an astute diplomatic offensive which would seek to enlist France, Britain, India and, perhaps, even Russia and all other sources of potential use in a bonafide effort to bring about an end to the North-South Vietnamese conflict. A settlement might be on terms which reduced our influence (and costs) provided it also inhibited Chinese political domination. France is the key country.
- c. It would involve U.S. understanding, sympathy and sensible encouragement for the Cambodian desire to stand on its own feet without one-sided U.S. aid. At this time, Cambodia would appear to be the principal prototype of any eventual peace for Southeast Asia. It would be an independent southeast Asia, not dependent on a costly U.S. prop. If Cambodia falls to its neighbors or if it goes over to China, we may as well resign ourselves to an involvement of years in all of Southeast Asia at great cost in resources and, probably, lives. Or alternatively, we will be faced with an ignominious and dangerous abandonment of the Southeast Asian mainland to Chinese political domination. In connection with these alternatives we need to keep in mind the rising public hostility towards foreign aid in particular and government costs in general.

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Vietnam, Memos and Misc.

² No record of this conversation of December 5 has been found.

³ Attached was a copy of Mansfield's August 19 memorandum to the President ([vol. III, p. 585](#)) and a statement from Mansfield to Kennedy, November 20, on U.S.-Cambodian relations, not printed.

⁴ The speech, which was attached, was a commencement address by Mansfield to the graduating class of 1962 at Michigan State University, June 10, 1962, entitled "Interests and Policies in Southeast Asia." See [vol. II, p. 448, footnote 4](#). The report, which was not attached, is apparently that of December 1962 which was sent to the President and reflected Mansfield's own conclusions; see *ibid.*, p. 779. This report was subsequently sent to the Senate in modified form in February 1963; see [vol. III, p. 122](#).

356. Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant
for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President
Johnson¹

Washington, December 9, 1963.

RE

Ike and Cabot Lodge

Joe Alsop has just called to tell me that Felix Belair² swears up and down that General Eisenhower told him personally of his interest in having Cabot Lodge get into the race, and specifically said that he had let Lodge know of this interest. Joe said that General Eisenhower called Belair today, however, to say that Lodge was only one of many and that he (Eisenhower) could not support any one candidate over another because his travel expenses in all his Republican travels were paid by the Republican National Committee!

Mike Forrestal is just back from Saigon and reports that Cabot has indeed begun to think in terms of political possibilities. Mike's guess is that Lodge would very much like to be honorably free of his responsibilities in Saigon and is hoping to be able to report to you in about two months that the situation is so much better that he can now fairly ask for relief.

I report all this because you may want to have it in mind in your last instructions to Bob McNamara before he goes out there. If I understand your thinking correctly, it might be desirable to have Bob say flatly to Lodge that if he can leave the situation clearly better than he found it, after six months, it will be entirely reasonable for him to ask for relief in February. (He went out in late August.)

McG.B

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Aides Files-Bundy, Memos to the President.

² *The New York Times* reporter.

357. Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant
for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President
Johnson¹

Washington, December 10, 1963.

SUBJECT

Your meeting with David Nes at 12:15 p.m.²

Nes is the nominee of Rusk, Ball, Harriman and Hilsman for the job of DCM to *Lodge*. I have reviewed his record, obtained additional recommendations, and talked with him. Subject to your interview and assessment, I agree with the recommendation.

I attach answers to overnight queries which I sent to John Ferguson, the Ambassador in Morocco, a shrewd man who was Nes' last boss, and a message from David Bruce³ who knew him ten years ago in Paris, and this year while he has been at the Imperial Defense College. You will see that they both rate him very high.

Nes is soft-spoken and a little bit more Ivy League than I myself like in tone and accent. He is also shrewd and knowledgeable, and while there is nothing quite like the job in Saigon, it is true that the job in Morocco was complicated and varied.

Nes showed justified confidence in his ability to cope with AID and CIA. He said the main problem would be with the juggernaut of the military, with lots of brass, lots of money, and a limited sense of politics. I agree with him.

I told Nes that a major problem in this case would be to combine loyalty to a quite strong-minded Ambassador with effective management of all kinds of details in which the Ambassador would not be interested. He showed immediate comprehension. Indeed, what I liked most was his eagerness to take on an assignment in which it may easily be impossible for him to satisfy us all. A timid man would not want to be Lodge's deputy right now.

If you approve the recommendation, it is planned that Nes should go with Bob McNamara to Saigon and then check back in Washington to

finish his briefing, and in London to get his family. We can get him on the scene in the first week of January, fully briefed and organized, and I think more haste would make less speed in this case.

I will pursue you after your meeting to get your orders.

McG.B.

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Memos. to the President, McGeorge Bundy. Confidential.

² According to his daily appointments diary, the President met with Nes and Bundy on December 10 from 12:37 to 12:55 p.m. (*Ibid.*) No record of the conversation has been found. Nes took up his duties as Minister-Counselor and Consul General in Saigon on January 19, 1964.

³ Neither the answer from Ferguson nor the message from David K.E. Bruce, Ambassador to the United Kingdom, has been found.

358. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, December 10, 1963—6:39 p.m.

922. Embtel 1135.² You may categorically, and in a manner most likely to convince them, say to the Generals that USG in no way favors neutral solution for SVN. As you know, powerful voices such as NY Times³ and Lippmann have been advocating some sort of neutral solution but this in no wise reflects US Government policy which has consistently been a win the war policy. As you know from recent messages, this is US policy from the top down. You may further tell the Generals that Secretary McNamara's trip is further evidence of our determined effort to accelerate our joint effort to defeat VC and not to let a single detail escape us that might contribute to this goal.

As for Sihanouk's conference proposal, you may say we are not going to participate in any conference under circumstances or conditions which would jeopardize SVN interests or our mutual objectives. Latest developments in Cambodia make it unlikely that a conference could be held under conditions which would be acceptable to us as well as to Thais and Vietnamese.

FYI. Only conceivable reason for US to attend conference would be possibility of positive gains resulting. We have in mind, for example, provisions making it impossible for Sihanouk to abandon neutrality and throw in completely with Chicoms and a mechanism that would be effective in sealing the border. Neither looks at all possible at the moment. End FYI.

You may say we are consulting with our other allies and we will continue in close consultation with GVN. French asked for three-way talks with UK and us and we are going to have them in Paris this week.⁴ You can tell Generals that this is part of consultation process and we are not going there to barter away our own stake in SEA or Vietnamese and Thai interests.

FYI only. UK and France apparently still favor conference. There is little disposition here to attend a conference, particularly in light of latest Cambodian outburst⁵ and we are going to try to persuade UK and

French of the dangers inherent in conference and the impracticality of trying to force Vietnamese and Thais to attend willy-nilly.

Please repeat to Paris for Koren report of meeting.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret; Flash; Limit Distribution. Repeated to Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Vientiane, Paris, London, and CINCPAC. Drafted by Koren; cleared by Hilsman in draft, by Forrestal, and by Harriman; and approved by Ball. *Forrestal* sent the following memorandum to Bundy, December 10, describing this telegram:

"I have cleared an unnecessarily lengthy telegram from the Department to Lodge telling him we are against neutralism and want to win the war, and that is why McNamara is coming out. Any conference we might agree to about Cambodia would have nothing to do with neutralism in South Vietnam, and we are now inclined to doubt that circumstances make any conference on Cambodia possible. We are still consulting our allies and will keep in touch with the GVN." (Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Vietnam Cables)

Bundy wrote "O.K." on the text of the memorandum.

² Telegram 1135, December 10, reads as follows:

"I have been asked to meet at 10 am tomorrow morning with Generals Minh and *Don*, Prime Minister Tho and Foreign Minister Lam. Subject is Sihanouk's neutrality proposal. It would be most helpful if I could be authorized to say at this meeting that US has decided to oppose conference and, in any event, not to participate itself. We have reports that some of Generals are seriously concerned that US secretly favors neutral solution for South Viet Nam and that there is even suspicion that my stop-over in Paris on the way back to Saigon was for the purpose of talks with French in this vein. At this critical juncture I should like to be in a position to lay their fears to rest definitively." (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET)

³ See the editorial in *The New York Times*, entitled "Cambodia and Vietnam," December 12, 1963.

⁴ This working-level meeting in Paris eventually resulted in a proposal for a declaration by the Cochairmen of Geneva Conference of 1954, the Soviet Union and Great Britain, on Cambodian neutrality, and a protocol for a potential conference. Differences between the United States and Cambodia prevented acceptance of the proposals.

⁵ On December 8, Thai Prime Minister Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat died and the Cambodian Government declared a national holiday. During the celebrations, Sihanouk supposedly stated that the enemies of Kampuchea, Ngo Dinh Diem, Ngo Dinh Nhu, Sarit Thanarat, and “the great boss of these aggressors,” presumably a reference to President Kennedy, had all died recently. (Memorandum from *Hughes* to Rusk, December 9; Johnson Library, National Security File, Cambodian Country Series)

359. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, December 11, 1963—7:30 p.m.

1142. CINCPAC for POLAD. Paris for Koren. Ref: Deptel 922.² Following summarizes major points of 1-1/2 hour meeting this morning with top GVN officials, including Generals Minh, Don, Kim, Dinh, Prime Minister Tho, Foreign Secretary Lam.

1. GVN leaders expressed deepest possible concern over unfortunate effects on war effort of a negotiated settlement before victory. This concern apparently brought to surface by New York Times editorial of December 8³ which was discussed in an AFP despatch captioned "The New York Times and the conference proposed by Prince Sihanouk" carried by Vietnam Press. They pointed out that apparent acceptance of proposal on neutrality conference on Cambodia and of Vietnam negotiation prior to victory by such influential journal as New York Times was having serious effect on morale Vietnamese engaged in anti-Communist struggle. While Generals mentioned specifically deleterious effect on morale of junior officers, quite clear that they equally shaken.
2. I read them pertinent sections reftel which reassured them considerably, but, while appreciating general tenor of telegram, Lam immediately saw loophole in wording of tel which implied we might go to conference under certain conditions. I reassured group that we had no intention of participating in a conference which would jeopardize US or GVN interests. I also said US at Paris would seek to persuade UK and France of conference dangers.

We also discussed US long-range policy toward Cambodia as well as GVN thinking about its own position vis-a-vis RKG. Details this discussion being reported other channels.⁴

At strong urging GVN leaders, I promised to try to get official public clarification our position re conference which would tend to refute New York Times version.

Fuller report follows.⁵

Comment: I definitely believe US should make public statement, either in Washington or Saigon, making it absolutely clear, without mentioning New York Times' name, that we do not agree with the thought in the editorial.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution. Repeated to Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Paris, London, and CINCPAC.

² Document 358.

³ See [footnote 3](#), [Document 358](#).

⁴ Not found.

⁵ Telegram 1143 from Saigon, December 11. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET)

360. Memorandum From Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson¹

Washington, December 11, 1963.

VIETNAM

You will probably be meeting with Secretary McNamara before he takes off on his mission to Saigon and the following (which is based upon my recent visit there)² may be of help to you in giving guidance to the Secretary.

The Present Situation

The most urgent current problem in South Vietnam is the strong Viet Cong position in the delta provinces just south of Saigon. Recent reports have suggested that Communist control of these provinces may be far more wide-spread than we had previously thought. One recent report states that out of 219 strategic hamlets in the Long An Province which had been reported as completed under the Diem regime, only 45 have actually been identified.³ The implication is either that the Viet Cong have infiltrated a large number of established hamlets because of the failure of the GVN to protect them, or that the province chiefs under the old regime reported as completed hamlets which did not meet the criteria of the strategic hamlet program. Since allocations of money to the various provinces were made on the basis of the number of hamlets reported completed, there was an incentive both for political and financial reasons for province chiefs to tend to exaggerate the number of strategic hamlets built.

To some extent the recent rather alarming reports may be the result of a new look being taken by the new regime at an old program. There is, however, evidence that a certain amount of inertia has occurred in provincial administration since the coup. A large number of the province chiefs have been changed and some of the newly appointed ones have been changed again. This has produced a certain indecisiveness in administration, the effect of which has been transmitted downwards through the district chiefs and into the villages.

Another problem has been the fact that the strategic hamlet program was closely associated with Counselor Nhu and consequently has been criticized by the leaders of the new regime. These leaders have not, however, come up with new programs or new directives to replace the old; and until they do, subordinate officials of their highly centralized Government are not apt to take any initiatives.

On the military front, however, there is some cause for optimism. Since there is now virtually no political interference in military operations, regional commanders have, in some areas, shown more aggressiveness and drive than they had in the past. More effective contact has been made with the enemy by the ARVN, and our military people in Saigon feel optimistic for the future.

The principal difficulty remains what it always has been, i.e. bringing the government effectively to the villages in such a way as to win the peasants' confidence and support.

Operations Against North Vietnam

For some time the Central Intelligence Agency has been engaged in joint clandestine operations with ARVN against North Vietnam. Despite considerable effort, however, very little has come of these operations, partly because of the tight police control in the North and partly because of their very small size. It would be worthwhile exploring the possibility of larger-scale operations against selected targets in the North provided we carried them out in connection with a political program designed to get a practical reaction out of Hanoi. So far such a program has not been worked out and—even more importantly—the capacity for carrying out larger-scale operations does not now exist. It will take time to develop such a capacity, and there is no reason why we should not do so while we try to work out a diplomatic scenario in which military pressure against the North would play a part.

Laos Cross Border Operations

There has been considerable interest in stepping up operations across the Laotian border from South Vietnam against the "Ho Chi Minh Trail." This is a perennial and has often come up when difficulties develop in the military situation within South Vietnam. Actually we have had little or no hard intelligence since October of last year on the use of Laos as a corridor into South Vietnam. The recent discoveries of new weapons and ammunition supplies in South Vietnam have been made in the Delta and

in the Ca Mau Peninsula in the southernmost part of the country. I was told in Saigon that the best guess was that these were supplies reaching South Vietnam through Cambodia via the Mekong or from the sea. Nevertheless, carefully controlled intelligence operations across the Laotian border should be considered provided we balance carefully the risk of discovery which would upset the delicate balance of forces in Laos against what we would expect to gain from these operations. In order to do this, we should try to keep the operations as covert as possible and make sure that Ambassador Unger in Vientiane has a say in what goes on. Past experience has shown that the best way of accomplishing this is to control this kind of operation covertly through CIA, rather than through military channels.

Guidance for Secretary McNamara

In light of the above, you might wish to tell McNamara that you hope he will be able to focus the attention of the Vietnamese generals on their first priority problem, the immediate restoration of administrative initiative in the provinces, especially the Delta. They should subordinate all political dickering among themselves to the fundamental necessity of getting the most effective officials appointed-and having done so, they should keep them in their jobs and support them. Secretary McNamara might also tell them that in his opinion it is of utmost importance to establish a new program for the villages and immediately issue the necessary implementing directives. He might also offer our help in getting up such a program, something which should be rather easy for us to do, since it would draw heavily from the old Strategic Hamlet Program.

Secretary McNamara might also direct our own military and intelligence people to cooperate on devising a significant capability to strike at selected targets in North Vietnam. The question of when and how we would use any assets we can develop would be deferred until the Government here has worked out a program.

Lastly, Secretary McNamara and Director McCone should investigate ways and means of ensuring that Laos cross border operations are conducted covertly both from the Vietnamese and U.S. point of view and subject to the closest kind of control to ensure that we don't upset Ambassador Unger's continuous juggling act in Laos.

Mike

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Memos. and Misc. Top Secret. Also published in Declassified Documents, 1975, 174C.

² After the Honolulu meeting on November 20, Forrestal and Kattenburg went to Vietnam. Forrestal also visited Cambodia at the end of the month and returned to Washington early in December.

³ See [Document 352](#).

361. Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Harriman) and Michael V. Forrestal of the National Security Council Staff¹

Washington, December 11, 1963—6:45 p.m.

Harriman said he thought Cambodia is more important than Laos as an infiltration ².

Forrestal said he believed he said that in his memorandum about Cambodia.³ The sea frontier is the place where the supplies come in.

Forrestal said the first priority has nothing to do with the border.

Harriman said you are diverting attention.

Harriman told Forrestal that if he talked to Bob [McNamara] about this he hoped he would talk particularly about the problem of Cambodia. He said you have seen the latest take and it is quite distressing. We still want to see if our Amb could produce something.

Forrestal said that when he left Honolulu he was told there would be no decision made on cross-border operation. He said he came here and found they are ready to go.

Harriman said nobody had agreed to it.

Forrestal said Kaysen is going out.

Harriman said Bill [Colby?] is going too.

Forrestal said the Pentagon has the responsibility and has the control.

Harriman didn't think this was true.

Forrestal insisted they did. He said he talked to McCone and says they have no control.

Harriman said Bill is not under this impression.

Forrestal asked where the messages come in if we don't see them any more. He said that is why we don't have control any more.

Harriman said Bill saw a few but they divulged nothing.

Forrestal said the only ones Bill could see are the old CIA ones. He said whenever CIA is in control, we are okay. He said it is important to have Leonard [Unger] come down and explain.

Harriman said he was not worried about seeing this thing approved. He said he thought it was okay for him to come down. Also they are afraid there may be some shooting from the other side. If you want him to come down, okay. Unger has to be briefed and be told to have a stiff back.

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Memoranda of Telephone Conversations. Transcribed by Dolores Perruso.

² Ellipsis in the source text.

³ Forrestal said this in his memorandum on Vietnam, [Document 360](#).

362. Telegram From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)¹

Washington, December 12, 1963.

DIASO-34783-63. The President has asked me to stop in Saigon on my return from the NATO meeting in order to assure that we receive promptly the plans and recommendations of the Country Team for:

1. Covert operations by South Vietnamese forces, utilizing such support of US forces as is necessary, against North Vietnam. Plans for such operations should include varying levels of pressure all designed to make clear to the North Vietnamese that the US will not accept a Communist victory in South Vietnam and that we will escalate the conflict to whatever level is required to insure their defeat.
2. Cross-border operations into a strip of Laos approximately fifty kilometers wide. The operations to be carried out by specially trained South Vietnamese forces utilizing such US advisory personnel as are necessary. These operations would be designed both to obtain evidence of infiltration of military cadres and military equipment from North Vietnam into South Vietnam and also to disrupt such infiltration.
3. Such aerial reconnaissance as is required to check on the extent of infiltration of arms from North Vietnam to South Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia.
4. Border patrol activities designed to determine and check the extent of the infiltration of cadres and military equipment from North Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia to South Vietnam.
5. Accelerating and intensifying the military campaign against the Viet Cong in thirteen critical provinces. You will recall we agreed in Honolulu that the Country Team would prepare a detailed analysis of the political, economic and military problem in each of these provinces and a detailed plan providing for the solution of those problems. The plans should be specific as to geography, time and resources to be employed.

As a foundation for the review of these plans, I should like to receive the Country Team's appraisal of the effectiveness of the new government's political, economic and military programs.

I expect to arrive in Saigon mid-morning, Thursday, December 19, and hope to meet with you and your staff during that day and the next to review in detail the plans and recommendations which I have been instructed to take back with me to Washington. William Colby and General Krulak will arrive a day ahead of me for the purpose of completing a preliminary review before I arrive.

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Cables. Secret; Eyes Only. Repeated to the Department of State for Hilsman and the White House for McGeorge Bundy. The time of transmission on the source text is unclear.

363. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, December 12, 1963, 3 p.m.

1146. Pls pass SecDef McNamara from Lodge. Your DIASO 34783-63.²

1. Appropriate members of US Mission are preparing plans and recommendations to cover all points your telegram.
2. Regarding your paragraph 5, believe that a political problem strictly speaking has not yet emerged in the provinces because the new government has not yet made up its mind on what its carrot versus stick equation is to be. Moreover the evaluation of the political situation in each province can only be done by a politically-minded person who is on the spot and speaks the language and knows the individual people. Neither the USOM rep nor the MAAG officer nor our own Embassy language officers are in a position to do this.
3. Referring to the second paragraph of your paragraph 5, the new government has not yet produced political, economic and military "programs". The most that one can say so far is that they are discussing ideas and notions. I hope they will have some programs by the time you get here, but I doubt it.
4. I assume you will want to go to work immediately on arrival and am planning to hold the meetings in the MAC/V conference room which is the best room we have in Saigon for this purpose. I estimate that two days should be allowed for the presentation you want.
5. Would like one hour of your time for myself alone.
6. Will have office space for you.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 7 US/McNAMARA. Secret. Received at 5:15 a.m. and passed to the Department of Defense for McNamara at 6 a.m. and to the White House at 6:03 a.m.

² Document 362.

364. Minutes of Meeting of the Special Group for Counterinsurgency¹

Washington, December 12, 1963, 2 p.m.

PRESENT

Governor Harriman, Mr. McCone, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Wilson vice Mr. Murrow, Mr. Solbert vice Mr. Gilpatric, Mr. Poats vice Mr. Bell, General Krulak vice General Taylor, Mr. Nolan vice the Attorney General

Mr. Hannah and Mr. Mendenhall were present for Items 2 and 3

Mr. Margolies was present for Item No. 4

Mr. Cottrell and Mr. Maechling were present for the meeting

[Here follows agenda item 1.]

2. Southeast Asia Status Report

Viet-Nam—Mr. Mendenhall stated that the war is going badly and pointed out specific reasons why there has been lack of progress in the Delta area. He added, however, that a number of recommendations are now being considered to reverse this trend.

It has been difficult to get Strategic Hamlet moving again because of the lack of central direction and the re-establishment of administrative controls. Mr. Mendenhall believes that it will take some time for the new Government to improve this condition.

Mr. McCone commented that a recent report has been brought to his attention which states that the situation in Long An Province is rapidly deteriorating. He asked if all the responsible agencies agreed with this appraisal. There was general agreement that the situation in this province is serious and that prompt action is needed.

Mr. McCone stated that the responsibility of the Group to follow up reports on Viet-Nam that indicate a need for action should be clarified. During the last few months, the Group had received advance warning by various individuals that the hamlet program in the Delta was becoming over extended but apparently no action was taken to look into this situation.

The Chairman suggested that following Secretary McNamara's trip to Viet-Nam, the role of the Group to follow up on the execution of

programs for Viet-Nam should be reviewed and clarified.

Thailand—Mr. Hannah reported that, in general, all programs related to internal security are progressing satisfactorily and it is planned to follow up on those programs that require special attention. Problems will undoubtedly arise as a result of Sarit's death. Although Thanom has been named Prime Minister, it is believed that there will be considerable maneuvering for power by various rivals and cliques. However, at this time the political situation looks favorable.

The Country Team has been asked to report by the end of the month on progress that has been made to get the Thai Government to prepare their own version of the Internal Security Plan.

The Group requested that Defense submit a full report as soon as possible on what additional steps will be taken to correct the deficiencies in the locomotives sent to Thailand.

3. Remarks by Mr. Forrestal

Viet-Nam—Mr. Forrestal stated that he agreed that the situation in the Delta was serious and that one of the reasons that this has not been uncovered before is that previous reports on progress at the province level had been too optimistic.

He observed that there is inertia within the new Government; although they recognized that they have problems, little has been done to resolve them, or to take positive action. He recommended that the US Government get across to the key generals that they should stop political quarreling and concentrate on the war effort in threatened provinces. We should assist the current Government in the preparation of a new hamlet program in order to get this program moving as soon as possible. If we concentrate on the war, and not divert our attention to marginal problems, the chances of success will be greatly enhanced. He recommends that a high priority be given to the Delta.

Mr. McCone added that the Amnesty Program is important and should be included as part of any accelerated program.

During a discussion on the validity of reports on progress in the provinces, Mr. Forrestal stated that it should be understood that normally there are only two US advisors at the province level, one representing the military and the other the AID mission. These individuals have only

a limited opportunity to obtain a detailed assessment of the situation and, by necessity, have to rely on the province officials as their chief source of information.

[Here follow Forrestal's remarks about Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand and agenda item 4.]

James W. Dingeman
Executive Secretary

¹ Source: Department of State, Special Group Counterinsurgency Files: Lot 68 D 451, Minutes of Meetings. Secret. Drafted by James W. Dingeman who is not listed among the participants.

365. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, December 12, 1963—3:55 p.m.

931. CINCPAC for POLAD. Paris for Koren. Saigon's 1142 and 1143.² We concur your view on desirability public statement US position on international negotiations regarding Viet-Nam. Believe it would be better for statement to be made in Saigon than Washington since that should be less likely provoke press request for US public statement (which we prefer avoid) on proposed international conference on Cambodian neutrality.

Suggest you make statement along following lines:

"International discussion of the Viet-Nam problem has been suggested in some press circles. I wish to state that the US Government does not see that any purpose would be served by international talks on Viet-Nam. It, therefore, is giving no consideration to such talks.

"US policy toward Viet-Nam continues to be as outlined by the late President Kennedy in 1961 and as reaffirmed by President Johnson. Like the Republic of Viet-Nam, we are devoted to peace. Our primary purpose in Viet-Nam is to help the government and people of -South Viet-Nam maintain their independence.

"As President Kennedy stated in 1961,³ the measures we are taking to assist the defense efforts of South Viet-Nam will no longer be necessary if the Communist authorities in North Viet-Nam will stop their campaign to destroy the Republic of Viet-Nam.

"Our goal is thus to return to the cease-fire established in Viet-Nam by the Geneva Accords of 1954. If Hanoi will cease and desist in its subversive aggression against the Republic of Viet-Nam, and the Government in Saigon is thereby enabled to extend its authority without resistance throughout South Viet-Nam, a cease-fire will result.

"Meanwhile, as long as Hanoi continues to support the guerrilla war against the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam, the US will continue to furnish whatever assistance is required to help that government resist aggression."⁴

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET Confidential; Priority. Drafted by Mendenhall; cleared by Hilsman, Robert J. McCloskey, Deputy Director, Office of News, Bureau of Public Affairs, and Frank P. Lockhart, public affairs officer in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs; and approved by Harriman. Repeated to CINCPAC, Phnom Penh, Bangkok, London, and Paris.

² Telegram 1142 is [Document 359](#); regarding telegram 1143, see [footnote 5](#) thereto.

³ Apparent reference to Kennedy's letter to Diem, December 14, 1961, the text of which is printed in Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1961, p. 801.

⁴ The Embassy, in telegram 1157 from Saigon, December 13, took exception to the Department's proposed statement. The telegram reads as follows:

"GVN's immediate concern is conference on Cambodian neutrality which they rightly fear would encourage neutralism in South Viet-Nam and undermine will to fight in this country. As proposed statement does not address Cambodian neutrality proposal, I do not believe it would be reassuring to GVN, given context in which question has been raised. We are better off standing on Deptel 922, substance of which I have passed to them privately, and which goes further than proposed public statement.

"I must reiterate as strongly as I can that until U.S. has turned down Sihanouk's proposal definitively, there is going to remain in Viet-Nam a large residue of doubt about our ultimate intentions. And this doubt will inevitably have a bad effect on the determination of the new Vietnamese leadership to pursue the war effort vigorously." (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET; telegram 922 is [Document 358](#).)

366. Memorandum From the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (Carroll) to the Secretary of Defense (McNamara)¹

Washington, December 13, 1963.

S-18982/P-3

SUBJECT

(S) THE VIET CONG IMPROVED COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS AND INSURGENCY POSTURE

1. The attachment is an assessment of the Viet Cong's military capabilities in the Republic of Viet-Nam, with emphasis on factors most likely to affect the Viet Cong insurgency effort.
2. This information has been provided to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and to interested elements of the Joint Staff.

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, OSD Files: FRC 69-A-3131, Vietnam 381. Secret; No Foreign Dissem.

367. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, December 16, 1963—7:25 p.m.

949. Saigon 63 to Paris, 1164 to Dept.² Re report that General Dinh is so concerned over Sihanouk's conference proposal that he is considering how to "accommodate himself to a neutral solution for Viet-Nam." As precautionary measure it seems to us useful to make special effort to reassure Dinh and others who may also be concerned. Nothing is further from USG mind than "neutral solution for Viet-Nam." We intend to win. Secondly, as we have said, we are not going to attend conference unless positive gains for South Viet-Nam can be achieved, such as effective action to seal border.

Ball

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Confidential; Immediate. Drafted by Conlon, cleared by Harriman, and approved by Hilsman. Repeated to Paris for Rusk and to CINCPAC for POLAD.

² In this telegram, December 16, sent from Saigon to Paris and repeated to Washington, the Embassy expressed hope that Rusk, who was attending the North Atlantic Council Ministerial Session at Paris, December 16-17, would meet with the Vietnamese Ambassador-designate to Great Britain, Vu Van Mau, and reassure him that the United States was not considering a neutral solution for Vietnam. (*Ibid.*) The meeting apparently did not take place, given the Secretary's schedule and other direct assurances to the Vietnamese.

368. Central Intelligence Agency Information Report¹

Washington, December 16, 1963.

TDCS DB-3/658,497

SUBJECT

Situation Appraisal as of 14 December 1963

1. This is a field appraisal of the current situation. It is not an official judgment by this Agency or any component thereof. It represents the observations and interpretations of a staff officer based on information available to him at the time of its preparation. Prepared for internal use as a guide to the operation environment, this commentary is disseminated in the belief that it may be useful to other agencies in assessing the situation for their own purposes.
2. The situation in South Vietnam from 8-14 December 1963 continued to be marked by a lack of forward motion on the part of the country's new rulers in getting on with the many-sided struggle against the Viet Cong (VC). The Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) continues to shuffle province chiefs and district chiefs around; in some provinces a succession of chiefs has been appointed since the 1-2 November coup. However commendable is this reflection of the junta's desire to get the best possible team into the field, in the short term it has contributed materially to the disturbing degree of paralysis that now afflicts provincial administration. Another cause of this slowdown includes the continuing non-articulation of the new regime's pacification policies and confusion over the chains of military and civil command and their interrelationships.
3. Much of the current confusion and paralysis is unavoidable. The MRC rightly calls the 1-2 November action a revolution, in the sense that it swept away the whole elaborate fabric of the Diem regime's controls. However burdensome and oppressive these controls seemed to many, local officials at least had some idea of what was expected of them and had the organizational resources for implementing national policy in the countryside even though imperfectly and oppressively. The VC have been quick to move into this vacuum of authority and initiative. Opinions vary as to the extent of Communist gains since the coup, but most observers agree that the VC have made definite progress and that in some areas, the situation has deteriorated to a disturbing extent. Particularly hard hit in certain provinces has been the Strategic

Hamlet Program. It is difficult at this time to judge whether this slippage in the program can be attributed to inherent defects, which are only now coming to light under the country's new management, or whether it is the result of the current lack of firm leadership at the local and national levels. Both factors are undoubtedly involved, although their relative importance is hard to gauge. In any event, the time is short in which the new regime can get itself organized and challenge the Communists' initiative without risking setbacks of possibly long-term significance.

4. One action, taken on 12 December, which may help break the log jam in the MRC's efforts to put itself on a better war footing was the exchange of commanders in I and II Corps. Major General Do Cao Tri has taken over II Corps, and Major General Nguyen Khanh has moved to I Corps. Tri had for some time been slated for II Corps, but Khanh's new assignment had been the subject of conflicting reports and possibly the cause of contention within the MRC.
5. As is often the case, heightened concern over the situation in the countryside comes at a time when VC attacks and harassment activities have in fact entered a period of relative decline, following the Communists' record effort in November. Judging from the experience of past years, the outlook is for a continuation of this trend for the next week or so, to be followed by a brief flareup of enemy activity in observance of the third anniversary of the founding of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSVN) and a more sustained offensive after the first of the year, extending to the period of Tet, which will be observed in mid-February. It should be noted that the activity indicators provide no measure of the erosion of the Strategic Hamlet Program, which is probably continuing, even though the level of VC guerrilla activity is temporarily down.
6. The honeymoon period between the new regime and the press appears to be drawing to a close. MRC Chief Major General Duong Van Minh, flanked by leading members of the MRC Executive Committee, on 9 December held what appeared to be a suddenly-called press conference at which he reaffirmed his confidence in Premier Nguyen Ngoc Tho and mildly admonished the press to remember its responsibilities in a country at war, warning it against promoting neutralist sentiment, among other things. Much more incendiary was Tho's own self-defense at a press conference held on the succeeding day. Tho sought to clarify, not too successfully, his role in the capture and subsequent execution some years ago of Hoa Hao extremist leader Ba Cut. He also defended his part in the Buddhist affair last summer, correctly stating that he had counseled moderation to Diem. Exchanges between Tho and the attending journalists are reported to have been quite heated,

suggesting that the none too popular Tho may be an easy mark for the press and confirming previous indications that he will increasingly be a center of controversy and a political liability for General Minh. Minh's and Tho's warnings to the press were quickly followed by the suspension of three vernacular newspapers.

7. The new regime's sensitivity to the subject of neutralism was heightened during the week by the suggestion of The New York Times that a negotiated settlement with the north should perhaps be explored and by Sihanouk's gratuitous and unwelcome offer to "federate" with South Vietnam, if only the latter would stop fighting the Viet Cong and espouse a neutral foreign policy. In conversations with Ambassador Lodge and other American officials, junta leaders have shown great concern over the possibility that the question of the neutralization of South Vietnam might come up at any international conference held at Sihanouk's request to discuss Cambodian neutrality. This specter, given some substance by Sihanouk's federation proposal, would appear virtually to preclude South Vietnamese participation in a conference, which in other ways would have been distasteful enough to Vietnam's new rulers even if restricted to the subject of guarantees for Cambodia.
8. The Generals continued, by personnel shifts and arrests, their efforts to break up coup groups which had been in existence prior to 1 November and which had been in competition with them. Among recent actions to this effect were the arrest of Dr. Tran Kim Tuyen's top lieutenant Nguyen Duy Bach; the arrest of Huynh Van Lang, a former director of the Exchange Office and a Saigon University professor; and the consignment of Lt. Col. Pham Ngoc Thao to the limbo of a five month course at Fort Leavenworth. Other field grade and junior officers judged to have trouble-making potential are reported to have been transferred out of Saigon or are slated for military attache posts abroad.
9. Field dissem. State (Ambassador Lodge) USMACV (General Harkins) CINCPAC PACAF ARPAC PACFLT.

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Memos. Secret, Routine No Foreign Dissem/No Dissem Abroad/Controlled Dissem Background Use Only. A note on the source text indicates this information was acquired in Saigon December 8-14. Forrestal sent this report to Bundy under cover of a memorandum, December 17 which reads as follows:

"The attached is as good a wrap-up on the Vietnam situation as I have seen in the last few days. The President might be interested." Also published in *Declassified Documents, 1975*, 57B.

369. Report on the Situation in Long An Province¹

Saigon, December 20, 1963.

As a result of your demonstrated interest, Long An has become the center of interest, at least momentarily. Some facts and figures:

Of the 219 hamlets previously reported as completed (with some 50 more supposedly in advanced stages of construction), no more than 35 now are considered to be capable of achieving the purpose for which built—that is, of separating the people from the Viet Cong while providing them both security and an opportunity for social and economic development. Please note: 9 of these 35 hamlets actually comprise a part of the provincial capital or of district towns.

147 armed militia squads previously were reported to be available in this province (even this figure seems low for the 219 hamlets supposedly in existence—some of them immense in area). Actually, no more than 50 squads exist and they are quartered in 37 hamlets.

167 hamlets now are said to have suffered extensive damage from the Viet Cong. Of this number, only 5 still have any armed militia available (the key to their defense).

Some personal observations.

Three of the six districts were visited briefly during recent trip. Some particulars on at least one hamlet in each of these districts:

Nguyen Huynh Duc (Thu Thua District). Located about 5 kilometers south of Tan An and just off Highway 4, this is said to be the best hamlet in the province. Homes are pleasant, look permanent, have shade and fruit trees, gardens, etc. Since the Village Administrative Headquarters is located here, there is also a 45-man SDC post. The post is in a fairly poor state of repair—weapons looked barely serviceable, no evidence of recent attempts to improve defenses. Directional arrow for air support was in very poor repair—no tallow pots available for night use. The hamlet militia were said to accompany SDC on patrols “for training” but were armed only with grenades. All SDC questioned were most

vague as to extent of patrol activity. SDC were not uniformed despite USOM representative's assurance that uniforms were readily available. It was reported that no hamlet radio was available for three of the four hamlets in this village complex.

Hoa Phu (Binh Phuoc District). No more than 4 kilometers west and south of Tan An, this hamlet has been destroyed. Only 3 or 4 families remain of some 130. Many of the houses have been pulled down completely; the fence is down almost everywhere and much of it has been cut into small pieces. Interviews with the hardy survivors indicated they stayed because they felt they had the permission of the Viet Cong because of special circumstances. (One woman, for example, had a husband in prison at Tan An.) Hamlet militia previously existed and had been armed but had dispersed and turned in their weapons to the nearby SDC post. This hamlet was described by Rosenthal as the worst thing he had seen in his travels throughout the country.

Within easy pistol shot of Hoa Phu, there was an SDC platoon ensconced behind a moat, barbed wire, etc. This platoon apparently did not move out to aid the nearby hamlet when (it was said) a small number of Viet Cong came and "asked" the people to pull down their houses, cut the fence, etc. The post showed no evidence of recent improvement. The arrow for air support was completely overgrown by weeds, for example. SDC had no uniforms, generally seemed apathetic. Detachment was armed with French MAS rifles, had no automatic weapons. However, this platoon did have the weapons of previously armed hamlet militia squads from two nearby hamlets. (Why—with Long An less than 4 kilometers away—were these weapons unnecessarily exposed to VC capture?)

In very early afternoon, with a fairly large armed escort, the deputy province chief was reluctant to stop at Hao Phu. We drove back to Tan An at breakneck speed after our visit.

Tap An (Thanh Duc District). District, as a whole, is considered by local Americans to be the best in the province. Two of the eleven armed militia squads still available to the district are in Tap An. The hamlet had no radio—was dependent upon wire which was clearly visible and could easily be cut. Nonetheless, this hamlet is in extraordinarily good shape when compared with another nearby—*Thu Bo*. About 40% of the dwellings were destroyed there. Those persons remaining seemed to feel they did so at the sufferance of the Viet Cong. This hamlet was "supported" by an SDC post across the river—by "patrols" and by "direct automatic weapon fire"! Questioning developed that this fire was over

the roofs of the houses. District chief (who seemed both able and energetic) said that only about 8% of those families entitled to a relocation allowance in the entire district had received same. Although his district is divided by a broad river, the district chief had no patrol craft under his jurisdiction.

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-1-3470, 12/19-12/20/63, SVN Visit. Confidential. Authorship of this report is not given, but a note in Lodge's handwriting on the source text reads: "By an intelligent American who recently visited Long An and doesn't want to sign his name." It was handed to McNamara in Saigon by Lodge.

370. Memorandum of Conversation¹

Saigon, December 20, 1963—3:45 p.m.

PARTICIPANTS

General Minh; General Don; General Kim; Prime Minister Tho; Secretary McNamara; Mr. McCone; Ambassador Lodge (who acted as interpreter)

PLACE

Joint General Staff Headquarters

1. Secretary McNamara began by asking General Minh how he proposed to organize the command in Viet-Nam so as to accelerate the war effort. There was concern in the United States, he said, about the speed and intensity of the war, and we would like to know under whose hand it is going to be put.
2. General Minh replied that General Don was in immediate command of the Army.
3. McNamara asked whether General Don, who is also Minister of Defense, did not have a great many other duties and raised the situation in III Corps, which is commanded by General Dinh who is also Minister of Interior. It appeared to Secretary McNamara that neither General Don nor General Dinh could possibly operate all the jobs for which they are responsible.
4. General Minh replied that it might appear that way, but that actually the III Corps was well organized and that it consists of two divisions—each of which is separately commanded—with General Dinh providing the civil support.
5. When Secretary McNamara said that it would be better if General Dinh did not have so many different jobs, General Minh replied: You may be right but this has worked.
6. Secretary McNamara then referred to Long An Province and some of the other critical provinces and said that he felt he was familiar with the way things were at the bottom of the social structure and that it was obvious that there was no strong hand in charge. He pointed out that the I Corps was commanded by General Tri, and II Corps was commanded by General Khanh, and the IV Corps by General Cao and asked why the III Corps should not be equally well commanded.
7. General Minh pointed out that the III Corps had actually been divided into two small corps—one commanded by General That and one by General Thieu.

8. Referring to Long An Province, General Don said that the former province chief had been absolutely worthless but that he had been replaced by a good man. He said that the new government was working toward the day when there would be separate persons for the jobs of Minister of Defense and Chairman of the Joint General Staff, both offices which he now holds; and when there would be separate persons for III Corps Commander and for Minister of Interior, both of which posts are now held by General Dinh.
9. General Minh said that it was prudent to make maximum use of the services of experienced men in a time of transition and that if you had nothing but people in the government who had no experience, you would have confusion.
10. Under pressure from Secretary McNamara, General Don said that during January a full time III Corps Commander would be named. General Minh amended that time to be "January or February".
11. Secretary McNamara said that the GVN was right to set priorities and to pick out those particular provinces in the Delta, but he had been struck by the fact that the total number of troops in the whole country showed the GVN had a superiority of five-to-one over the Viet Cong, yet in these critical provinces the Viet Cong actually had a numerical superiority over the GVN. This made no sense.
12. General Don said that Secretary McNamara must have seen the old plan because, under the new plan, the troops would be deployed as Secretary McNamara desired.
13. Secretary McNamara asked General Don to provide him with the new plan before his departure and to take it up with General Harkins.
14. General Minh then described the great results they expected to get from getting the sects to come over to the government's side. Already the Hoa Hao had come over, and on December 27 there was going to be a rally in Tay Ninh conducted by the Cao Dai at which their allegiance to the government would be proclaimed. He felt that the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai between them could contain the Viet Cong in their respective provinces and make more troops available for the critical Delta provinces.
15. In response to question as to who was the Chief of State, Minh said that he was. If a stronger or abler man could be found he would step aside in his favor. But at present he was the boss. He was not Naguib and there was no Nasser. There were no fights; the other generals helped him as a general staff helps a commander.
16. U.S. could do them a big favor if they could dissuade Time and Newsweek from publishing untrue articles about division among the generals. When I expressed surprise that English language publications had such an effect, Premier Tho said that the articles were translated

into Vietnamese and widely re-printed in Viet-Nam press. "You see, we now have freedom of the press", General Don said somewhat bitterly.

17. On the matter of neutralism, General Don referred to the student demonstration in front of the French Embassy this morning and which had gone "from 1,000 to 10,000". Secretary McNamara said the U.S. was resolutely opposed to neutralism and that a negotiation for neutralism was actually a negotiation for servitude. When General Minh brought up U.S. attitude on Cambodia conference, Secretary McNamara countered with the thought that Sihanouk had observed V.C. success in Viet-Nam in November and December and had concluded that neutralism was really going ahead in Southeast Asia and that he had better join the parade. This seemed to head off more talk about U.S. attitude on Cambodian conference, which is usually a topic for heated and prolonged conversation.
18. Secretary McNamara then brought up the question of General Minh's acting like a Chief of State and making some speeches to the people which would give them hope and faith in the future. General Minh replied that he and Prime Minister Tho had had two press conferences and wasn't that enough? When it was pointed out that this wasn't the same thing as a really good speech, he said that on January 2 the Council of Notables would be installed, and he hoped to make a speech then. He also wanted to introduce television into Viet-Nam so that he could use that as a way of rallying the people.
19. Mr. McCone recalled that when Vice President Johnson had become President, he had speedily obtained the support of the people by the speeches he had made in Congress and to the people and felt that much could be learned from his example. The generals were quick to point out that things were different in Viet-Nam from what they are in a democracy and stressed the fact that Vietnamese people are "extremely difficult". If many speeches were made, they would be considered to be dictators; whereas if they accomplished things and solved problems province-by-province and did not talk, they would come to be appreciated for their works.
20. When Secretary McNamara spoke of our desire to help, he illustrated it by announcing that 42 artillery pieces were going to be sent from the U.S. and that we were going to provide uniforms for the SDC whose morale, he was told, was very bad.
21. General Don and General Minh explained that the SDC in these critical Delta provinces had not been recruited locally as was supposed to be done because under the Diem administration it was impossible to recruit SDC in those provinces. Therefore, outsiders were brought in from the north who did not belong to the community and who had pillaged, looted, and held up hamlets for money. When the people of a

hamlet refused to give them money, they would say that the Viet Cong would attack them and would bring down artillery fire on the hamlet which refused to contribute. It was really not a question of the morale of the SDC but of the fact that they were pillaging and looting and now they were being sent back to the north where they came from.

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-4370, 12/19-12/20/63 SVN Visit. Secret; Limited Distribution. Presumably drafted by Lodge who signed it. Sent to Washington in telegraphic form in telegram 1192 from Saigon, December 20. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 7 US/MCNAMEARA)

371. Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State
for Far Eastern Affairs (Hilsman) to the Secretary of
State¹

Washington, December 20, 1963.

SUBJECT

The Situation in South Viet-Nam

Summary:

The over-all situation in South Viet-Nam is a matter of serious concern. There are a number of reasons for this-in the wake of the November 1 coup there has inevitably been considerable confusion and disorganization as the new leaders have begun to shape the Government to their liking; the military situation, particularly in the delta, has deteriorated because of a high level of Viet-Cong activity against a background of Government reorganization of its own military efforts. Nevertheless, the new Government appears to recognize the problems confronting it and seems eager to seek our advice and assistance. The generals have moved, although slowly, toward bringing increased civilian influence into the Government, and they appear to recognize the vital importance of working out an effective resolution of their serious economic problems.

Political Situation:

The Government announced on December 19 the appointment to a civilian Council of Sages of 60 persons, including a number of non-Communist oppositionists to the Diem Government. The terms of reference and effective powers of the Council are still unknown, but, if the new Government gives it an effective voice in the direction of national policy, it could represent a considerable step forward. Otherwise, the generals who led the coup still seem to be working together in reasonable harmony, although it cannot yet be said that they have effectively coped with the problem of reorganizing the Government in a fashion calculated to inspire increasing national support. Whether they will succeed in doing so is the central question which now confronts us in Viet-Nam.

Military Situation:

The Viet Cong took advantage of the confusion following the November 1 coup to step up their attacks on strategic hamlets, particularly in the delta area. The number of attacks carried out by the Viet Cong has now dropped to pre-coup levels, but the capability for increased activity on their part remains unimpaired. The confusion attending the Government's reassignment and replacement of virtually all province chiefs and many district chiefs clearly affected its ability to respond effectively to the increased Viet Cong activity. However, the level of Government military action against the Viet Cong has increased to some extent and is reflected in an improved ratio of Viet Cong killed in action as opposed to Government killed in action (from 2-1 to 4-1).

The important military question now confronting us is whether the Government, with our assistance, can effectively concentrate its effort in the delta area in a manner capable of overcoming the Viet Cong threat.

Economic Situation:

We have embarked upon extensive joint talks with the Vietnamese Government, centering mainly on the aid program, but covering a wide range of economic problems. Carl Kaysen is now in Viet-Nam to guide these discussions. The question which confronts us here is whether the Government can attack its major economic problems in a constructive way thus improving mobilization of its economic resources in support of the war effort and the peace to follow.

¹ Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, POL 1 General Political. Secret. Drafted by Joseph W. Neubert, Koren, Conlon, and Montgomery and signed by Hilsman. A note on the source text indicates that Rusk saw this memorandum.

372. Report by the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (Krulak)¹

Washington, December 21, 1963.

REPORT ON THE VISIT OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE TO SOUTH
VIETNAM

19-20 December 1963

Since October, when the Secretary of Defense and General Taylor visited Vietnam, there have been great changes; some have been good, some bad, most have been foreseeable. In some cases the changes resulted from the coup, others result from the circumstances which created the coup. Together they unite to portray a serious—but by no means irretrievable—situation.

Operations of the governmental mechanism—at the top and at the bottom—have decelerated greatly. The military Junta, comprising the best Vietnamese combatant leadership, is preoccupied with politics, for which they are not well qualified, and is largely diverted from the practical task of prosecuting the war. The civilian element of the government is of marginal quality, generally lacking in the breadth required to make the complex administrative mechanism move. Provincial officials are unsure—of their authority, of their obligations and of their tenure. The same is true of the several layers of military command. In a very real sense there has been an authoritarian revolution in Vietnam.

Moreover, it is not finished. There are still continuing vibrations in both authority and responsibility. Administrative functions are not efficient, orders are often ignored or given lip service. Little evidence of improvement is yet visible and, until stability does emerge, essential things will not get done. This is the first and greatest problem.

By and large our leadership is pressing the GVN to do the right things; trying to show them the way, and the Vietnamese are receptive to our advice. However, receptive is not synonymous with responsive. Orders are issued, but they are often not carried out—because the chain of authority is still preoccupied with its own political and economic survival, and the supervision is just not there. In many cases the orders

are unrealistic, where the task assigned exceeds both the means and the time allotted.

The unfavorable condition now obtaining in the Vietnamese political and military systems has been exploited aggressively by the communists. The Viet Cong, immediately following the coup d'etat, intensified their guerrilla efforts across the whole of the country. From an average of 400 violent incidents per week they moved quickly to over 1,000 in the week following the coup. The Vietnamese, who were suffering from a combination of indecision and post-coup euphoria, were quite unprepared for the widespread and vigorous guerrilla attacks. This violent activity met with little success in the northern and central parts of the country. However, in the Delta, where there had already been deterioration during the pre-coup period, isolated watchtowers, indefensible guard posts and poorly defined hamlets-most of which should never have been built in the first place-fell to the Viet Cong efforts.

Although the increased tempo of activity has been costly to the Viet Cong in casualties, and though they have been unable to sustain the intense level of operations, they have still given unmistakable evidence of strength and a respectable exhibition of skill as well. In the area South of Saigon, where the situation has never been good and where the people are more interested in tranquility than in political alignment, the Viet Cong have had success in recent weeks. In this area the government's position is much weaker now than two or six months ago, and it is likely that this success has encouraged the Viet Cong to intensify their efforts still further.

In the view of the Vietnamese leadership, the deterioration process in the most critical Delta regions has stopped, and they insist that a painstaking rebuilding effort is afoot. This appears excessively sanguine, there being little evidence that the provincial administrations have yet crystallized on their immediate affairs.

While time is probably running in favor of the government in the area North of Saigon, just the reverse applies in the Delta. Here, it would seem, they must either stem the deterioration and start upward during the coming dry season (January-May) or face an almost unmanageable problem when the next wet season comes on. The men at the top perceive the urgency of the situation, but do not seem to grasp the importance of the time factor in the equation.

This suggests two basic actions on our part. First, to inspire the Vietnamese leadership truly to lead, to make everything secondary to fighting the war, closing promptly and vigorously with their critical problems in the Delta; and second, to give the Viet Cong and their supporters early and unmistakable signals that their success is a transitory thing, that it does not warrant an escalation in material support, that the new Vietnamese regime is strong and that it and the United States are both resolute in their determination to reverse the post-coup Viet Cong success.

In connection with the first action-crystallizing the leadership to do the right things and do them powerfully, we prepared for a meeting with the military junta by reviewing carefully the situation in the critical provinces, the worst of which are near to Saigon. We heard from those U.S. military and civilian functionaries who have on-the-spot responsibility, as to what the situation actually is, and what their plans are for setting it right. An example is Long An Province, of which you have read. It is in bad condition. In the summer, the hamlet program, which had been going forward satisfactorily, began to outstrip the military pacification campaign. Indefensible hamlets began to succumb to the Viet Cong depredations. Then the coup preoccupied the province administration completely and the Viet Cong seized the initiative, almost without hindrance. Grave though the situation now is, it is still repairable, and our representatives have a reasonable plan for bringing the change about. Their plan, however, cannot be made effective until Vietnamese deploy more forces to the area, and until we increase the depth of our own supervisory and advisory talent. Accordingly, a decision was taken to press the Vietnamese to double the troop density—adding three battalions to the forces now in the province, while we immediately move to increase our own civil and military representation there from 9 to 23 people.

A similar appraisal of the situation in the other critical provinces of the Mekong Delta resulted in conclusions of the same general magnitude. All told it will involve deployment of 13 Vietnamese battalions into the Delta and an increase of about 360 U.S. personnel in the area.

The general tactical formula will be to consolidate firmly the areas which are now under government control, using regular forces to give the residents an unquestioned measure of security, while paramilitary forces are trained or retrained. Meanwhile the visible social and economic foundations which will contribute to the lasting strength of the region

will be rapidly rebuilt. This process will be gradually extended, increasing steadily the secure and tranquil areas.

Meaningful evidence of progress—or its absence—in pursuit of the program will be available to us through the reports of our own increased representation on the spot. There is no reason why these provinces cannot be out of the crisis condition in less than a year, and reasonably tranquil in two.

Coupled with specific treatment of the critical provinces, and in contemplation of a conference with the Junta, we discussed ways to enhance the effectiveness of the military and paramilitary forces. The Self Defense Corps—heart of the rural local defense, suffering [*suffers*] heavy casualties but enjoys little in the way of recompense. We decided-and commenced the action—to provide them with uniforms, which they eagerly want, as a morale factor. We decided also to meet a need for more artillery in the Delta area by adding 42 artillery pieces to the existing organization. In regard to the matter of exhibiting the strength and resolution of the Vietnamese to their northern counterparts the conference discussed several methods of rendering the North Vietnamese participation in the war more costly, and thus less attractive.

An excellent military-CIA study [which] had been made in response to our request prior to arrival of the party, covered direct pressures which might be focused upon North Vietnam, in terms of actions of escalating intensity, ranging from minor propaganda moves to destruction of major resources by raid or bombing. The study was based on the premise that by covert means the North Vietnamese would be warned that their support of the Viet Cong insurgents was about to bring down direct punishment and, after an interval, to proceed with selected elements of the escalative program, making clear always that it would stop when the assistance to the Viet Cong stopped.

The great bulk of the resources for such a program are already in country, and selected steps could be undertaken promptly. After a further discussion with the appropriate agencies in Washington a recommendation will be submitted regarding specific tasks which should be undertaken. Central to the Washington appraisal will have to be matters such as increased over-flight of Laos, use of bases in Laos and Thailand and a comprehensive estimate of international and North Vietnamese reactions to these steps. Meanwhile, and in advance of any detailed approvals, it was decided to commence assembly, in country, of all resources required for any part of the program.

As another deterrent to aid from North Vietnam, the meeting discussed the matter of operations in a narrow strip of Laos (50 kilometers deep) by regular Vietnamese forces, supported by air supply, aerial photography and air attack, if required. The primary purpose of the actions would be to acquire intelligence on Viet Cong infiltration from the North and, where hard targets appeared, to attack them.

Here, as in the case of North Vietnam, the political problems in the context of the value of what we expect to find, associated with violation of Laotian territory, need study before a specific recommendation can be made.

The group was briefed on the slowly developing CIA covert program in Eastern Laos, where Meo and Kha tribesmen are being trained for intelligence gathering. The program has developed satisfactorily, and could be expanded to seek intelligence in the same general area as it is contemplated that the South Vietnamese would investigate. Due to the hostile nature of the area, it would be necessary for the tribesmen to move in larger groups, armed and prepared to fight for their information, if required. This currently exceeds policy authority, which restricts them to operating clandestinely in small teams. Anticipating the possibility that the Washington evaluation may result in authorization for broadening the scope of their actions, a decision was made to commence training tribesmen in the necessary weapons operation and related tactics.

Finally, the meeting studied the problem of increasing the task of the Viet Cong by intensifying surveillance to all the means of ingress in South Vietnam-the Laos and Cambodian borders, the Mekong river and related waterways and the seacoast.

While we know all too little of just how much material and how many men are being infiltrated into the battle, there is evidence that it is considerable. Bloc arms are appearing in greater numbers and greater variety and conservative intelligence analysis of documents and prisoner of war interrogation fix the number of hard core infiltrators at well over 1,000 for this calendar year.

The meeting concluded that surveillance of the Laos and north Cambodian borders can never be highly rewarding, but that it can be improved by better use of resources already in country. The Advisory Command has developed a program which marshals the means available in a more effective manner, and has already begun to press its adoption on the Vietnamese.

The maritime infiltration problem is even more difficult, but is susceptible of more effective action. The U.S. Advisory Command has developed a plan for intensified surveillance of the seaborne approaches to the Delta as well as a system of barriers, check points, curfew and mobile patrols to impose restraints upon Viet Cong movement over the 4700 miles of inland waterway in the area. At the best, these measures will be little more than deterrents, nor would the situation be greatly altered by a great increase in resources. The solution will ultimately be found in the sum of all the counterinsurgency efforts, whose totality will cause the Viet Cong to lose ground, resources, support and heart faster than they gain them.

Following the plenary meeting, the Secretary of Defense, the Ambassador, Mr. McCone and General Harkins conferred with members of the Military Revolutionary Committee and Prime Minister Tho. Matters discussed were as follows:

- a. A strong case was made to persuade the Vietnamese group that the war is suffering from the fact that key people are attempting to fulfill two major obligations (Gen Dinh as Minister of Interior and III Corps Commander; Gen Don as Minister of Defense and Chief of the Joint General Staff). Their reaction, initially defensive, became favorable at least in the case of Dinh, in that they stated—with some indefiniteness—that the problem would be corrected in January or February.
- b. The Committee was made aware of our conviction that there is now a serious troop imbalance in the country; that a far greater troop density is required in the Delta at the expense of other, more tranquil areas. Following some face-saving discussion it was agreed that the Joint General Staff will work with General Harkins on the problem.
- c. Our concern with the committee character of the executive branch of their government was discussed, which elicited a qualified disclaimer by General Minh, who asserted that he does, in fact, make the decisions. Withal, the Vietnamese position was not convincing and the U.S. conferees were left in some doubt as to the actual manner in which executive decisions are taken.
- d. General Minh, as the most promising political figure of the group, was enjoined to make himself more accessible to the people, to speak publicly and to convey directly the programs of the government. He asserted that it is planned that he shall do this, commencing this month.
- e. The value to the government of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects was discussed, with a report by General Minh that on December 27th the Cao Dai will declare their allegiance to the new government. Minh

stressed that their allegiance will contribute substantially to improvement of the security of the Cambodian border.

- f. With respect to Cambodia the U.S. position respecting neutralism was presented to the Committee, in terms of our estimate that Sihanouk's current attitude is conditioned by his own belief that the Communists are winning in Vietnam. It was emphasized that we would consider it disastrous if this attitude were permitted to grow, and that it is up to the Vietnamese to thwart it—primarily by victories. For their part, the Vietnamese conferees deplored the neutralist writing in the U.S. press, and adverted specifically to our failure categorically to repudiate the New York Times.
- g. The meeting terminated on a note of cordiality, coupled with resolution and optimism on the Vietnamese side.
- h. The Ambassador maintained notes, from which a check-off list will be developed.

Actions

The following required actions flow from the meeting:

- a. Follow-up on decisions made regarding additional artillery, Self Defense Corps uniforms, increase of GVN forces in the Delta, increase in density of U.S. representation in the Delta area, and procurement of material to support a possible increase in offensive activity against North Vietnam. All of these follow-up actions rest within the Defense Department.
- b. Present for study by the Special Group (5412), the following matters:
 - (1) Whether, or to what extent, there shall be cross border operations from South Vietnam into Laos, to include ground reconnaissance patrols, ground combat patrols, air resupply, tactical air support and air photography—either singly or in combination. The Defense Department should prepare the presentation.
 - (2) Whether, or to what extent, there should be an intensification of pressures on North Vietnam through covert and military means. The Defense Department and the Central Intelligence Agency should prepare the presentation.
 - (3) In connection with (2) above, what shall be the authorities for overflight of Laos and the transit use of Laotian territory. The Defense Department and the Central Intelligence Agency should prepare the presentation.

Conclusions

The physical resources—men, equipment and supplies—required to win the Vietnam war are all present, with minor exceptions. The plans to bring victory about are basically sound, subject to some refinement. The Vietnamese are willing to follow our advice, albeit belatedly in many cases, and the advice is good.

These are essential factors in the formula for victory. But there are two others. One is Vietnamese leadership. This is latent but not now being exercised, for reasons treated earlier. The other is administrative and combatant experience. This the Vietnamese simply do not have.

The first shortcoming can be eliminated by the Vietnamese themselves, if they will set aside their less formidable problems of executive power distribution and face up to the need for unity and vigor in pursuing the war. On this we can do little more than advise and urge.

The second shortcoming can only be met by the passage of time, where the Vietnamese are concerned. However, our advisory mechanism is moving more every day to fill the time gap, taking a greater part in the direction of affairs. This, hopefully, will supply the final and essential ingredient precedent to victory.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam. Secret. Hilsman wrote the following note on a cover sheet: "This is Brute Krulak's report, probably TS."

373. Memorandum for the Record by the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' Special Assistant (Sullivan)¹

Washington, December 21, 1963.

SUBJECT

Report of McNamara Visit to Saigon, December 19-20, 1963

Because of a late arrival in Saigon, Secretary McNamara spent a greater proportion of his time with the United States officials and a lesser proportion with Vietnamese than he had expected. The discussions with U.S. officials lasted from his 3 p.m. arrival until 9:30 p.m. on Dec. 19 and from 7:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. on Dec. 20. They were resumed at 4:30 p.m. on Dec. 20 and continued until 6:30 p.m. The talks with Vietnamese officials were confined to the period from 1 p.m. to 4:15 p.m. on Dec. 20.

After a private talk with Ambassador Lodge, the Secretary's first discussion was with Ambassador Unger, and concerned the problem of infiltration into Vietnam through Laos. Unger and the Vientiane CAS station chief explained Operation Hardnose, discussed the political consequences of proposed cross-border operations from Vietnam into Laos, and reported on the intelligence estimate of Ho Chi-minh Trail activity. Also present were Ambassador Lodge, Mr. McCone, Mr. Bundy and myself.

Critical Provinces

The first group discussion with MACV, Embassy, USOM, USIS, and CAS personnel focused on the problem of the 6 critical provinces in the vicinity of Saigon and astride the Mekong-Bassac River complex. Both military and USOM province advisors reported personally on the situations they found in their various provinces. Their reports were uniformly discouraging and indicated a considerable falsification of data by the previous Vietnamese regime.

As a result of these discussions, it was decided to recommend to the Vietnamese that a total of 13 additional battalions be assigned to these provinces, that they be given priority attention, and that clear and bold plans be executed as soon as possible. It was also decided to assign an additional 340 U.S. military personnel to the 13 critical provinces.

Additionally, USOM would augment its employees, largely by hiring third country nationals, with a preference expressed for Filipinos.

North Vietnam Operations

The second agenda item (on the morning of Dec. 20) was the plan for operations in North Vietnam. A summary of this plan is attached (Tab A).² It is, in substance, a catalogue of actions which could be taken, either singly or in sequence, if and when political direction is given to execute such actions. As a result of this discussion, it was decided to take the necessary steps immediately to acquire and inventory whatever equipment would be needed for the proposed actions. Personnel would be recruited and trained, and all aspects of the plan would be readied so that they could be executed when directed. The plan will be studied by an interdepartmental group to be designated in Washington, and selected elements will be submitted to Special Group (5412).

Cross-border Operations into Laos

A plan for cross-border operations was tabled and subjected to considerable examination and criticism. Although the plan is being returned to Washington for study, it did not receive any encouragement from Secretary McNamara. The plan as conceived (summary attached as Tab B)³ would amount to a Vietnamese invasion of all Southern Laos over to the region controlled by the FAR. The invasion would be accompanied by U.S. personnel and would also envisage air strikes. I think it fair to say that this plan was a non-starter. The arguments which I presented against it were not rebutted, and indeed were in considerable measure reinforced by Mr. McNamara and Mr. McCone. Mr. McNamara later said he considered the plan "unacceptable".

Attention, instead, was turned to Hardnose operations inside Laos, and it will be proposed that the acceleration of this and the Kha plan be considered by appropriate Washington agencies. Particular interest was expressed in the stationing of Kha observation teams East of the Mekong River in the Laos Cordillera.

Photo Reconnaissance of Laos and Cambodian Frontiers

The case for low-level photo reconnaissance of the border areas inside Laos and Cambodia was not made convincingly. Mr. McNamara, therefore, proposed that it not be forwarded to Washington. He and Mr.

McCone did, however, agree that nondetectable U-2 serial mapping of the region would be desirable and they will so propose to Special Group (5412).

Delta Waterways Control

The presentation which was given on the control of waterborne traffic in the Delta was most discouraging. It is clear that the Mekong-Bassac River system and the ancillary canals are not only the prime avenues of Viet Cong movements in the critical areas but also a huge funnel for military and subsistence supplies flowing into the hard core of the principal Viet Cong base areas. Vietnamese Government control and interception of this traffic is nominal to non-existent.

The MACV plan presented for control of waterborne traffic was not very useful. First of all, it was directed to a whole series of canal and river checkpoints for population and traffic controls, envisaged a tight curfew and a considerable interruption of economic life in the Delta. Most importantly, however, it did not address itself except in the most cursory way to the problem of intercepting and controlling waterborne contraband infiltrating down the rivers from Cambodia.

I consider this a major shortcoming which we should not leave uncorrected and I have so informed Mr. McNamara. I recommend that the Department follow up on this problem and prod Defense and MACV for satisfactory action on this critical problem. I did so with Admiral Felt while transitting Hawaii and feel he will respond actively.

Discussions with Vietnamese Officials

Secretary McNamara's formal meetings with Vietnamese officials consisted of one briefing of better than 2 hours' duration at 1 p.m. on Dec. 20 and one more private session of nearly an hour immediately thereafter. In the first session he was accompanied by Ambassador Lodge, General Harkins, Mr. McCone, Mr. Bundy, Mr. Kaysen, Mr. Brent and myself. There were about twenty Vietnamese, mostly military, headed by Generals Minh, Don, Kim, Little Minh, Kiem, et al, as well as Prime Minister Tho, Foreign Minister Lam, the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Minister of Economic Affairs.

It was not a very satisfactory briefing. We were told frankly how bad the situation really was in the critical areas, why the previous regime had let it get that way, and how it could be retrieved. We were not,

however, given much indication of the manner in which the new government expected to go about its job.

In the private meeting, during the period from 3:30 to 4:15, Mr. McNamara was accompanied only by the Ambassador and Mr. McCone. The Vietnamese present were Generals Minh, Don and Kim, plus Prime Minister Tho. This conversation has been reported by cable from Saigon. (Tab C)⁴

Additional to these formal meetings, I met informally with Prime Minister Tho, Foreign Minister Lam, General Kim (who is Foreign Affairs member of the Junta) and with Ambassador Do Van Ly. All our discussions were on Cambodia, the French proposals for neutrality of Vietnam and the problems involved in a Cambodian Conference. I found them all well-informed, unemotional and realistic. They were uniformly concerned about the New York Times editorial on neutrality for Vietnam and about a Walter Lippmann column on the same subject. The general line I took with them was that Sihanouk was behaving as he did because his evaluation indicated that Vietnam was losing its war against the Viet Cong; and that therefore Sihanouk was attempting to hedge Cambodia's future by some sort of internationalized sanitation. I also said that our prime interest in Cambodia was to avoid having it become a completely communist controlled base for operations against Vietnam.

Comment:

The visit was a sobering one and Secretary McNamara typically took an honest, candid evaluation of it. I was particularly satisfied that he centered his primary attention on those problems which we in State have considered paramount (i.e., the six critical provinces, the redressing of troop balance, and the refurbishing of the strategic hamlet program) and did not get seriously diverted either in time or attention to the various red herrings of cross-border operations, aerial reconnaissance, etc. I feel confident his report to the President will be one in which the Department can concur.

¹ Source: Kennedy Library, Hilsman Papers, Countries Series-Vietnam. Top Secret. A note on the source text indicates this was Hilsman's personal copy.

² Not found.

³ Not found.

⁴ See [footnote 1, Document 370](#).

374. Memorandum From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to President Johnson¹

Washington, December 21, 1963.

SUBJECT

Vietnam Situation

In accordance with your request this morning, this is a summary of my conclusions after my visit to Vietnam on December 19-20.

1. *Summary.* The situation is very disturbing. Current trends, unless reversed in the next 2-3 months, will lead to neutralization at best and more likely to a Communist-controlled state.
2. *The new government* is the greatest source of concern. It is indecisive and drifting. Although Minh states that he, rather than the committee of Generals, is making decisions, it is not clear that this is actually so. In any event, neither he nor the Committee are experienced in political administration and so far they show little talent for it. There is no clear concept on how to re-shape or conduct the strategic hamlet program; the Province Chiefs, most of whom are new and inexperienced, are receiving little or no direction; military operations, too, are not being effectively directed because the generals are so preoccupied with essentially political affairs. A specific example of the present situation is that General Dinh is spending little or no time commanding III Corps, which is in the vital zone around Saigon and needs full-time direction. I made these points as strongly as possible to Minh, Don, Kim, and Tho.
- 3.

The Country Team is the second major weakness. It lacks leadership, has been poorly informed, and is not working to a common plan. A recent example of confusion has been conflicting USOM and military recommendations both to the Government of Vietnam and to Washington on the size of the military budget. Above all, Lodge has virtually no official contact with Harkins. Lodge sends in reports with major military implications without showing them to Harkins, and does not show Harkins important incoming traffic. My impression is that Lodge simply does not know how to conduct a coordinated administration. This has of course been stressed to him both by Dean Rusk and myself (and also by John McCone), and I do not think he is

consciously rejecting our advice; he has just operated as a loner all his life and cannot readily change now.

Lodge's newly-designated deputy, David Nes, was with us and seems a highly competent team player. I have stated the situation frankly to him and he has said he would do all he could to constitute what would in effect be an executive committee operating below the level of Ambassador.

As to the grave reporting weakness, both Defense and CIA must take major steps to improve this. John McCone and I have discussed it and are acting vigorously in our respective spheres.

4.

Viet Cong progress has been great during the period since the coup, with my best guess being that the situation has in fact been deteriorating in the countryside since July to a far greater extent than we realized because of our undue dependence on distorted Vietnamese reporting. The Viet Cong now control very high proportions of the people in certain key provinces, particularly those directly south and west of Saigon. The Strategic Hamlet Program was seriously over-extended in these provinces, and the Viet Cong has been able to destroy many hamlets, while others have been abandoned or in some cases betrayed or pillaged by the government's own Self Defense Corps. In these key provinces, the Viet Cong have destroyed almost all major roads, and are collecting taxes at will.

As remedial measures, we must get the government to re-allocate its military forces so that its effective strength in these provinces is essentially doubled. We also need to have major increases in both military and USOM staffs, to sizes that will give us a reliable, independent U.S. appraisal of the status of operations. Thirdly, realistic pacification plans must be prepared, allocating adequate time to secure the remaining government-controlled areas and work out from there.

This gloomy picture prevails predominantly in the provinces around the capital and in the Delta. Action to accomplish each of these objectives was started while we were in Saigon. The situation in the northern and central areas is considerably better, and does not seem to have deteriorated substantially in recent months. General Harkins still hopes these areas may be made reasonably secure by the latter half of next year.

In the gloomy southern picture, an exception to the trend of Viet Cong success may be provided by the possible adherence to the government of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects, which total three million people and control key areas along the Cambodian border. The Hoa Hao have already made some sort of agreement, and the Cao Dai are expected to do so at the end of this month. However, it is not clear that their influence will be more than neutralized by these agreements, or that they will in fact really pitch in on the government's side.

5.

Infiltration of men and equipment from North Vietnam continues using (a) land corridors through Laos and Cambodia; (b) the Mekong River waterways from Cambodia; (c) some possible entry from the sea and the tip of the Delta. The best guess is that 1000-1500 Viet Cong cadres entered South Vietnam from Laos in the first nine months of 1963. The Mekong route (and also the possible sea entry) is apparently used for heavier weapons and ammunition and raw materials which have been turning up in increasing numbers in the south and of which we have captured a few shipments.

To counter this infiltration, we reviewed in Saigon various plans providing for cross-border operations into Laos. On the scale proposed, I am quite clear that these would not be politically acceptable or even militarily effective. Our first need would be immediate U-2 mapping of the whole Laos and Cambodian border, and this we are preparing on an urgent basis.

One other step we can take is to expand the existing limited but remarkably effective operations on the Laos side, the so-called Operation Hardnose, so that it at least provides reasonable intelligence on movements all the way along the Laos corridor; plans to expand this will be prepared and presented for approval in about two weeks.

As to the waterways, the military plans presented in Saigon were unsatisfactory, and a special naval team is being sent at once from Honolulu to determine what more can be done. The whole waterway system is so vast, however, that effective policing may be impossible.

In general, the infiltration problem, while serious and annoying, is a lower priority than the key problems discussed earlier. However, we should do what we can to reduce it.

6. *Plans for Covert Action into North Vietnam* were prepared as we had requested and were an excellent job. They present a wide variety of sabotage and psychological operations against North Vietnam from which I believe we should aim to select those that provide maximum pressure with minimum risk. In accordance with your direction at the meeting, General Krulak of the JCS is chairing a group that will lay out a program in the next ten days for your consideration.
7. *Possible neutralization* of Vietnam is strongly opposed by Minh, and our attitude is somewhat suspect because of editorials by the New York Times and mention by Walter Lippmann and others. We reassured them as strongly as possible on this-and in somewhat more general terms on the neutralization of Cambodia. I recommend that you convey to Minh a Presidential message for the New Year that would repeat our position in the strongest possible terms and would also be a vehicle to stress the necessity of strong central direction by the government and specifically by Minh himself.
8. *U.S. resources and personnel* cannot usefully be substantially increased. I have directed a modest artillery supplement, and also the provision of uniforms for the Self Defense Corps, which is the most exposed force and suffers from low morale. Of greater potential significance, I have directed the Military Departments to review urgently the quality of the people we are sending to Vietnam. It seems to have fallen off considerably from the high standards applied in the original selections in 1962, and the JCS fully agree with me that we must have our best men there.

Conclusion. My appraisal may be overly pessimistic. Lodge, Harkins, and Minh would probably agree with me on specific points, but feel that January should see significant improvement. We should watch the situation very carefully, running scared, hoping for the best, but preparing for more forceful moves if the situation does not show early signs of improvement.²

Robert S. McNamara³

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, RG 330, McNamara Files: FRC 71-A-3470, South Vietnam, McNamara Statement. Secret. The signed original is in the Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Memos and Misc. Also printed in *Pentagon Papers: Gravel Edition*, Vol. 11, pp. 494-496.

² McNamara's more optimistic public statement is printed in *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents*, 1963, pp. 883-884.

³ Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

375. Letter From the Director of Central Intelligence
(McCone) to President Johnson¹

Washington, December 23, 1963.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: I have read Secretary McNamara's memorandum to you on the Vietnam situation.² My observations on the situation are covered in a separate memorandum which was left with Mr. Bundy on Saturday,³ but attached is a copy for your ready reference.

There is no substantive difference between Secretary McNamara and myself except perhaps I feel a little less pessimistic than he. Nevertheless, as I state in my conclusion, there are more reasons to be pessimistic than to be optimistic about the prospects of our success in South Vietnam.

Much depends on the ability of the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) to provide strong leadership and inspiration to the people of Vietnam, to properly administer the affairs of the country, and to successfully prosecute the war. All this is yet to be demonstrated.

I am dispatching to Saigon a number of our "old South Vietnamese hands" for temporary duty to assist in developing the necessary covert resources of native case officers and agents to inform us concerning the effectiveness of the MRC and the public acceptance of the new government. This has not been CIA's role in the past, as intelligence of this type has come through military channels. However I believe the next few months are so critical that information covertly developed will complement reporting we receive through the other channels.

I intend to return to South Vietnam in 90 days or sooner.

Sincerely,

John A. McCone

Attachment

HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSIONS IN SAIGON 18-20 DECEMBER 1963⁴

1. There is no organized government in South Vietnam at this time. The Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) is in control, but strong leadership and administrative procedures are lacking. Reports were received that province and district chiefs do not act because of the lack of direction and orders. Nevertheless, the MRC are confident. They feel they are winning the support of the people. They recognize there is a big job ahead but feel it is not insurmountable, and they feel their plan of organization will lead to success. They claim complete understanding among all members, however, there is evidence of tension, which, if it grows, could lead to serious political difficulties.
2. The Military Revolutionary Committee, MRC, has replaced about 70 percent of the 42 province chiefs and a substantial number of the 253 district chiefs. This replacement program is continuing. Many appointments are reported to be good, some not so good. The MRC feel that practically all must be replaced.
3. The MRC feel they have reached an understanding with the Hoa Hao and on 27 December will reach agreement with the Cao Dai. These arrangements could substantially improve the security of the Cambodian border, relieve GVN troops in Hoa Hao and Cao Dai provinces, provide important information on VC concentrations and activities, and have a significant psychological impact on the population. The success of the detente arrangements will bear significantly on the future of the GVN.
4. It is abundantly clear that statistics received over the past year or more from the GVN officials and reported by the US mission on which we gauged the trend of the war were grossly in error. Conditions in the delta and in the areas immediately north of Saigon are more serious now than expected and were probably never as good as reported. The Viet Cong control larger percentages of the population, greater amounts of territory, and have destroyed or occupied more strategic hamlets than expected. Admittedly, this area of South Vietnam had been recognized as the most serious. Revelation of factual data evidences a far greater problem for the GVN in arresting the unfavorable trend and recovering the situation than was thought.
5. Starting in about July, indices on progress of the war fumed unfavorable for the GVN. The number of Viet Cong attacks and the losses of strategic hamlets to the Viet Cong increased. VC casualties vs GVN casualties, weapons lost vs weapons captured, etc., all turned in favor of the VC and against the GVN. The trend lines were gradual until 1 November, the date of the coup, and then moved very sharply against the GVN because of a great increase in number and intensity of VC attacks in the weeks immediately following the coup.

6. The tempo of VC activities has slowed down. Incidents were fewer during the last week in November and have continued at a lower rate so far in December. Concurrently, the tempo of GVN activities has increased. Hence, the trend lines of all indices have turned in favor of the GVN in recent weeks, although in no instance has the situation which existed in June or July, 1963, been recovered.
7. There is continuing evidence of infiltration of cadres and small arms from North Vietnam through Laos and across the Laotian border. GVN intelligence reports indicate 1550 men with substantial but not precisely known quantities of arms have entered South Vietnam from North Vietnam through Laos this year.
8. Large machine weapons, such as recoilless rifles, mortars, and anti-aircraft guns, and men trained in their use, have appeared in the delta in recent months. It is not known whether they came through Laos and Cambodia and across the border, down the rivers, or by sea. Large weapons have not appeared in the northern sectors of South Vietnam.
9. The MRC recognizes the seriousness of the problems in the delta and have taken a number of actions which they feel will produce results. However, there is evidence of serious deficiencies in the Self-Defense Corps, which must be corrected. Also, there is an urgent need for substantially more organized GVN units in the delta and the provinces around Saigon.
10. The strategic hamlet has encountered resistance in the delta because relocation removed families from their fields and locations occupied for generations. Many defections of entire villages were reported as due to the above reason. The villages built along the banks of rivers and canals could not be rearranged into defendable compounds without hardships the villagers considered unacceptable.

Conclusion

It is my conclusion that the coup came when there was a downward trend which was more serious than was reported and, therefore, more serious than realized.

The military government may be an improvement over the Diem-Nhu regime, but this is not as yet established and the future of the war remains in doubt.

The Viet Cong are receiving substantial support from North Vietnam and possibly elsewhere, and this support can be increased. Stopping this by

sealing the borders, the extensive waterways, and the long coastline is difficult, if not impossible.

The VC appeal to the people of South Vietnam on political grounds has been effective, gained recruits for their armed forces, and neutralized resistance.

The ability of the GVN to reverse this trend remains to be proven. Much depends on the ability of the MRC to deploy their forces and pursue the conflict in a manner which will ensure the security of the people and provide them desired freedom, privileges, and some tangible benefits.

The lack of an outstanding individual to lead and absence of administrative experience within the MRC are ominous indicators.

The political stability of the new government under the MRC is subject to serious doubt. Conflicts of ambition, jealousy, differences of opinion over policy matters all are possible, could develop serious schisms, precipitate further dissensions and coup attempts all of which will affect the war effort against the VC.

Overcoming the VC movement by the GVN is formidable and difficult, but not impossible. The problems can be intensified by continuing increased support from NVN and political failures by the MRC. Hence, in my judgment, there are more reasons to doubt the future of the effort under present programs and moderate extensions to existing programs (i.e., harassing sabotage against NVN, border crossings, etc.) than there are reasons to be optimistic about the future of our cause in South Vietnam.

John A. McCone

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, Memos and Misc. Secret.

² Document 374.

³ December 21.

⁴ Secret. Drafted by McCone on December 21.

376. Editorial Note

On December 23, 1963, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Maxwell Taylor, met with President Johnson at 2:45 p.m., primarily to discuss Taylor's recent visit to India and Pakistan. At the end of the meeting, the President and Taylor briefly touched upon Vietnam. Taylor's account of this discussion reads as follows:

"Vietnam situation. He expressed concern over the situation in Vietnam. Plainly, he had been impressed by Secretary McNamara's recent report. The aspects of the discussion included personal consideration of Lodge and Harkins. I ventured the opinion that Harkins was probably the only general who could get along with Lodge and that the real solution probably lay in the substitution of a single military man to act both as Ambassador and as COMUSMACV. I had in mind the status of USCOB in Berlin."
(National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-36-71)

For McNamara's report, see [Document 374](#)

377. Letter From the Ambassador in Laos (Unger) to the Secretary of Defense (McNamara)¹

Vientiane, December 26, 1963.

DEAR MR. SECRETARY: I very much appreciated the chance to talk with you last week and to review what we here can usefully do about the problem of Viet Minh infiltration in South Viet-Nam via Laos.

Toward the close of our conversation, you very naturally asked why it is that Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma would react so negatively to South Vietnamese and U.S. intervention in Laos to cut off the Ho Chi Minh trail when he well knows that the North Vietnamese are every day violating the Geneva Accords by their use of the trail. There was little time to pursue that question, an important one, and I would like to try therefore to explain to you Souvanna's thinking in this regard as I understand it.

His entire emphasis is, as it has been for some time, to keep his country together and to bring to an end the civil war which has been plaguing it on and off for 20 years or more. Souvanna is persuaded that the civil war would long since have come to an end if it were not for outside stimulation and he recognizes that the most persistent and pernicious stimulation has come from the communist side. The Geneva Accords were specifically designed to bring such interference to an end and it is on these Accords that he, and increasingly other Lao as well, rest their hopes for their country's future.

The Prime Minister is optimistic but he is not naive, and he is well aware of the Viet Minh failure to live up to the Geneva Accords. He knows in general at least about their use of Laotian territory in their aggression against South Viet Nam. While he deplores this, his central aim remains, as noted, to hold his country together and damp down if not extinguish the civil war. Therefore, he has the most profound misgivings about any actions which risk making Laos again an international battleground, however much he might recognize Viet Minh responsibility for the problem. I am sure he is persuaded, and past history supports his view, that South Vietnamese or American intervention would not end the problem but would more probably again

lead to a new round of fighting from which the Lao would be the principal losers.

This does not mean, in my opinion, that we have to stand by and take it. As you know, I am persuaded there is a good deal we can accomplish through covert teams which are Laotian, even though considerably supported and guided by us. I am persuaded, too, that there is a chance of modifying Souvanna's view, as outlined above, to the extent we can have the Viet Minh intervention in Laos publicly exposed and condemned by responsible international authority, such as the ICC. This is easier said than done as the record of the past 18 months shows, but I believe that international condemnation of the Viet Minh might give Souvanna more confidence than he has today that they can be opposed, perhaps even with some outside help, without risking escalation and a new war in Laos. We are, of course, working on both these lines; meanwhile we will also do our best to help with those of the other actions discussed during our recent meeting which do not appear seriously to risk the undoing of the Geneva Accords and the structure built upon their foundation.

Sincerely,

Leonard Unger

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, OSD Files: FRC 69-A-3131, Vietnam 381. Secret. A note on the source text indicates that McNamara saw this letter.

378. Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' Special Assistant (Jorden) to the Under Secretary (Harriman)¹

Washington, December 27, 1963.

SUBJECT

Viet Cong Infiltration into South Viet Nam

Background.

This memorandum is based on an investigation of available evidence of continuing support in the form of men and materiel for the Viet Cong from sources outside South Viet Nam. A report on this subject dated November 28, 1963,² and prepared by MACV was considered. Interrogation reports of VC prisoners were studied. I also talked with American and Vietnamese officials, military and civilian, concerned with this problem during a visit to Saigon December 12-20.

Current Situation.

There is no doubt that the elaborate program of control and support of the Viet Cong by the Communist regime in North Viet Nam is continuing. The support ranges from words to weapons. Radio Hanoi and official publications in North Viet Nam boast openly of their "positive support" for the so-called Liberation Front in the South. Unfortunately, some of the evidence that points most clearly to Hanoi's connection with the Viet Cong cannot be used publicly for reasons of security.

The flow of military personnel from North Viet Nam into the South through Laos and Cambodia is continuing. The rate, however, appears below that of 1962 which in turn was less than 1961. Also, statistical indicators on the flow of infiltration must be taken with a grain of salt. In most cases they are derived from single sources and should be regarded as only rough approximations. On the other hand, we must assume that for every infiltration group exposed by the testimony of a defector or prisoner, there are other groups never exposed.

On the basis of prisoner reports, MACV estimates that more than 7,600 men have entered South Viet Nam from the North since January 1961. Of these, approximately 1,000 are believed to have entered this year. For the most part, recent entrants appear to have been political cadres, small unit leaders and specialists in armor, transport and antiaircraft.

Espionage agents continue to come from the North. Four from a seaborne operation were captured earlier this year.

The flow of weapons and ammunition of Communist bloc origin appears to have increased. Russian-made carbines have been picked up in increasing numbers. Heavier weapons, mortars and recoilless rifles and the like have been seized. In one raid on a VC supply depot this month, the GVN claims to have captured a large stock of weapons, ammunition and other equipment, much of it of bloc origin. For example, the haul included 160,000 rounds of carbine ammo and 100,000 rounds of Chinese heavy machine-gun ammo.

Chemicals for production of explosives have been seized in large quantities. Much of this apparently comes from Cambodia. Imports of such chemicals into Cambodia in the last year or so have greatly exceeded domestic requirements. In the raid cited above, more than two tons of potassium nitrate were found and destroyed. Other shipments have been captured on the waterways of the Delta region.

Other materiel of clearly non-Vietnamese manufacture—medical supplies, radios, communications equipment, etc.—have been found.

In summary, infiltration of men and materiel from outside South Viet Nam in support of the Viet Cong is continuing. However, this is but one factor among many in the situation. To regard it as the decisive element in explaining Viet Cong successes over the past year would be an error.

It is quite clear that the primary source of the VC manpower is the South Vietnamese population itself. It is also clear from the weapons loss ratio (2 to 1 in favor of the VC in recent months) that external supply of arms is not a critical matter.

Nonetheless, infiltration serves several important purposes from the VC point of view—in providing a supply of and/or replacement for key cadre personnel; in supplying heavy weapons for use against armored vehicles, reinforced defensive positions and aircraft; as a morale factor for the VC by providing constant reminders of external support; and as a source of

supply of equipment and material not readily obtainable through military action.

Conclusions.

Infiltration from the outside in support of the Viet Cong continues. There is sufficient evidence in hand to make a convincing case in the eyes of much of world opinion. We can demonstrate that the program of external support outlined in our earlier report ("A Threat to the Peace")³ goes on.

We should not undertake such an effort at exposure in isolation, however. It is far more important to take steps to halt or slow infiltration than to merely complain about it. Further, unless accompanied by positive actions to deter the process, elaborate treatment of the extensive Viet Cong effort and of the support it enjoys from outside would produce negative psychological reactions among the South Vietnamese and probably improve VC morale.

An amorphous world public opinion that is not going to respond in any case to the situation is less important than opinion among the South Vietnamese and the Viet Cong.

Exposure of the infiltration program makes sense only if it is associated with carefully conceived actions for which such exposure would provide part of the political and psychological base. In short, any public diagnosis of this particular disease should be accompanied by a prescription for cure or at least amelioration.

If, after considering all factors, we decide that exposure of infiltration is in our interest, we can accomplish it in several ways:

- 1) a fairly full treatment of the kind we did in December 1961 in "A Threat to the Peace";
- 2) a major speech on the subject by a leading figure in the Government;
- 3) a full-dress statement by Ambassador Stevenson at the UN;
- 4) detailed discussion in a Secretarial news conference or in a background session with the press;

We might also consider:

- 1) presentation of a detailed case in an appeal for action by the GVN to the International Control Commission

- 2) producing four or five VC infiltrators for questioning by the press in Saigon or at the UN.

The decision whether to use this material in public and, if so, in what manner depends on our purpose. What we say—and where and how—should be determined by what we propose to do about the problem.

¹ Source: Department of State, S/P Files: Lot 70 D 199, Vietnam 1963. Confidential.

² Not found.

³ *A Threat to Peace: North Viet-Nam's Effort To Conquer South Viet-Nam.* (Department of State Publication 7308, December 1961)

379. Message From President Johnson to the Ambassador in Vietnam (Lodge)¹

Washington, December 30, 1963.

I have just approved for dispatch to you via State Dept. channels the public letter to General Minh, and the additional confidential instructions for your use in talking to him.² I also want to send to you personally my best wishes and warm encouragement for the New Year.

When you agreed to go to Saigon you took on a hard and demanding assignment in the best tradition of patriotic readiness to serve, and now after four months, the government has been replaced; and a number of Americans have been replaced in accordance with your recommendations. These changes have removed obstacles to victory—but they have not assured it. The picture reported to me by McNamara, just before Christmas, makes it plain that there is a great deal yet to be done.

In the U.S. effort on the spot, by the very nature of things, you must be the man in charge. Your energy and leadership, your active supervision, your insistence on coordinated teamwork in all agencies—these are indispensable to an effective performance by our government in Saigon. And at the same time you yourself are bound to be the symbol and the instrument of American support and American counsel to the Minh government.

Some have suggested that there may be some political tension between us because you and I are of different parties. This of course is nonsense. If we can have victory in Viet-Nam there will be praise enough for all of us. So I rely on you to do all in your power to achieve it, and to be alert and demanding in telling all of us in Washington how and what more we can do to help.

With my warmest personal regards.

Lyndon B. Johnson³

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Heads of State Correspondence, General Minh Corres. Secret; Eyes Only. Transmitted to Saigon eyes only for Ambassador Lodge in telegram CAP 63663, which is the source text. The telegram was sent to the LBJ Ranch on December 30 for approval. (Draft telegram from Bundy to the President; *ibid.*)

² Document 380.

³ Telegram CAP 63663 bears this typed signature.

380. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, December 31, 1963—12:34 a.m.

1000. You are to seek appointment as soon as possible with General Minh and present him with unclassified letter from the President (text to follow) and make oral presentation. You should tell Minh that it is expected that the letter will be released at January 1 noon press briefing, Texas time, and that GVN would release simultaneously in Saigon. (FYI: If there are any changes in these plans we will inform you flash. End FYI)

Here follows text unclassified letter:

Dear General Minh:

As we enter the New Year of 1964, I want to wish you, your revolutionary government, and your people full success in the long and arduous war which you are waging so tenaciously and bravely against the Viet Cong forces directed and supported by the Communist regime in Hanoi. Ambassador Lodge and Secretary McNamara have told me about the serious situation which confronts you and of the plans which you are developing to enable your armed forces and your people to redress this situation.

This New Year provides a fitting opportunity for me to pledge on behalf of the American Government and people a renewed partnership with your government and people in your brave struggle for freedom. The United States will continue to furnish you and your people with the fullest measure of support in this bitter fight. We shall maintain in Viet-Nam American personnel and materiel as needed to assist you in achieving victory.

Our aims are, I know, identical with yours: to enable your government to protect its people from the acts of terror perpetrated by Communist insurgents from the North. As the forces of your government become increasingly capable of dealing

with this aggression, American military personnel in South Viet-Nam can be progressively withdrawn.

The United States Government shares the view of your government that "neutralization" of South Viet-Nam is unacceptable. As long as the Communist regime in North Viet-Nam persists in its aggressive policy, neutralization of South Viet-Nam would only be another name for a Communist take-over. Peace will return to your country just as soon as the authorities in Hanoi cease and desist from their terrorist aggression.

Thus, your government and mine are in complete agreement on the political aspects of your war against the forces of enslavement, brutality, and material misery. Within this framework of political agreement we can confidently continue and improve our cooperation.

I am pleased to learn from Secretary McNamara about the vigorous operations which you are planning to bring security and an improved standard of living to your people.

I wish to congratulate you particularly on your work for the unity of all your people, including the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, against the Viet Cong. I know from my own experience in Viet-Nam how warmly the Vietnamese people respond to a direct, human approach and how they have hungered for this in their leaders. So again I pledge the energetic support of my country to your government and your people.

We will do our full part to ensure that under your leadership your people may win a victory—a victory for freedom and justice and human welfare in Viet-Nam.

Sincerely, Lyndon B. Johnson

General Duong Van Minh, Chairman,

Military Revolutionary Council, Saigon.

Oral Presentation:

When you present the letter to General Minh you should also make following points confidentially on behalf of President Johnson:²

1. It is vitally important to act now to reverse the trend of the war as rapidly as possible.
2. We trust that personnel changes are now virtually complete and that both military commanders and province chiefs can now get down to the job at hand.
3. We hope that General Minh can designate a Chief of the Joint General Staff and a Commander of the III Corps who will have no other responsibilities and can devote themselves exclusively to these mammoth tasks.
4. We assume that, as General Don promised Secretary McNamara, the GVN will make available sufficient troops in the six key provinces in the III Corps to give its forces the necessary numerical superiority.
5. We have been glad to learn of the stress which General Minh places on small-unit actions, particularly in the Mekong Delta. We hope that equal stress will be placed on night actions, both for ambushing Viet Cong and for relieving villages under attack. To win the support of the population it needs to be emphatically demonstrated that the Viet Cong are being beaten precisely at their own game.
6. We consider it extremely important that the necessary civil-military coordinating machinery for clear-and-hold operations followed by an effective program to give the villages protection and security be established in Saigon.
7. It is likewise extremely important that program directives be issued at an early stage by the central government to lower echelons for proper implementation of all aspects of the program for giving villagers protection.
8. We also urge early revitalization of the amnesty program.
9. We are encouraged by the exploratory talks which the Vietnamese Government has held with Cambodian Government officials for improving relations between the two countries. We hope that both Governments can proceed to actual negotiations for the settlement of their bilateral problems.
10. We accept with pleasure General Minh's invitation to set up an American brain-trust to work with his government and we are prepared to furnish any personnel needed for this purpose.
11. General Minh can also be sure that he has the complete support of the United States Government as the leader of Viet-Nam. We believe he can magnetically rally the Vietnamese people if he will really try to do so. He should be told leadership is an essential political ingredient of victory such as was the case with Magsaysay in the Philippines.

Rusk

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 S VIET. Secret Flash. Drafted by James M. Montgomery of the Vietnam Working Group, cleared by Forrestal, and approved by Hilsman. A draft of the letter to Minh, a draft of the oral presentation, and a covering memorandum from Rusk to the President were prepared by Mendenhall on December 26. Rusk took the drafts and the memorandum to the LBJ Ranch in Texas on December 27 where the President approved them. Rusk's memorandum to the President reads in part as follows:

“As a follow-up to Secretary McNamara's visit to Viet-Nam, we recommend a Presidential message to General Duong Van Minh, Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council in Viet-Nam, stressing the urgency of action to reverse the adverse trend in the war as well as reaffirming the United States policy of complete support for the Vietnamese Government. At the same time public uneasiness and confusion in both the United States and Viet-Nam necessitate a highly authoritative statement of United States war aims, intentions regarding the withdrawal of military personnel, and policy on neutralization.”
(*Ibid.*)

To meet these two purposes, the memorandum recommended the letter to General Minh and a “supplementary message” to be delivered orally by Lodge.

² Lodge reported in telegram 1242 from Saigon, January 1, that he delivered the letter and made the 11 points to General Minh with General Kim present during an interview at 10:30 a.m. on January 1.
(*Ibid.*, POL 27 VIET S)

381. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, December 31, 1963, noon.

1235. CINCPAC for POLAD. Your 988.² I have already on several occasions explained to General Minh the importance of making a major declaration which would clearly and eloquently state aims to remove inequities and grievance and to open up an attractive future. I have also specifically mentioned the question of land reform. He knows my views and has told me that he is going to try to do just this in his January 2 speech. I really do not think it would be suitable for me to dash in on New Year's eve and repeat the advice I have already given. I think it would appear rather breathless and ineffective. I believe he is going to make a real attempt in his speech on January 2, that it is not going to be particularly good, but that it will be a first step, and that I can carry him along a little further when we have our next meeting, which he himself wants to have after, and not before, January 2.

Lodge

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 15-1 S VIET. Confidential; Limit Distribution. Repeated to CINCPAC.

² Telegram 988, December 27, reads as follows: "Since General Minh's January 2 speech to Council of Notables represents in sense inaugural address, we wonder whether you are consulting with him on substance. Would seem particularly helpful and appropriate for him to outline in specific concrete terms actions being taken to improve conduct of war and program for attracting support of rural population. Hope you can advise him on this." (*Ibid.*)

382. Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' Special Assistant (Sullivan) to the Under Secretary (Harriman)¹

Washington, December 31, 1963.

SUBJECT
Viet Nam

You suggested that I record a few thoughts concerning my two most recent trips to Viet Nam. I am attaching three memoranda. The first was a paper I did for Mr. McNamara in September concerning the political picture as I saw it in Viet Nam at that time. (Tab A)² The second is a memorandum to Roger Hilsman which I wrote on October 3 summing up my conclusions from that visit. (Tab B)³ The third is a memorandum which I dictated yesterday indicating what strikes me as the crux of the problem now facing us in Viet Nam. (Tab C)⁴

WHS

Attachment

Memorandum for the Record by the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' Special Assistant (Sullivan)⁵

Washington, December 31, 1963.

SUBJECT
Observations on Viet Nam

There is a People's Republic of the Viet Cong existing within the territorial limits of South Viet Nam. It sits astride the Mekong and Bassac Rivers and extends from the Cambodian border to the China Sea. In other words, it occupies most but not all of the territory known as the Delta Region of Viet Nam beginning only a few miles south of Saigon.

This Viet Cong stronghold has its own governing apparatus, runs its own military establishment, collects taxes, controls the waterways, and in general operates all of this territory with the exception of a few population centers and a few communication highways. It's fastened like

an incubus on the peasantry, which in general is passive, but from which it is able to recruit young men who staff its militia and who serve its purposes.

During the regime of Diem and Nhu, no serious effort was made by the Republic of Viet Nam to challenge this Viet Cong state on its own territory. A number of reasons can be advanced for this situation

1. Diem and Nhu advanced the theory that it was necessary to clean up the easier portions of the Viet Cong threat and establish a firm base before moving on to the more difficult areas. Hence, they concentrated on Northern and Central sections of the Country.
2. Diem and Nhu advanced the theory that the Viet Cong strategy was to gather strength in the Kontum-Pleiku highland area and then drive toward the coastal plains north of Saigon to be cutting the Country in two.
3. Diem and Nhu and most of their senior colleagues in their regime came from the North and Central portions of the Country and therefore, concentrated the bulk of their military strength in the protection of their own home land rather than moving on toward the South.
4. Diem and Nhu recognized the strength and ability of the Viet Cong in their stronghold and hesitated to challenge them directly for fear of encountering a catastrophe which would collapse both domestic and international confidence in their regime.
5. Nhu eventually came to believe that the strategic hamlet concept was the panacea for all problems of subversion and that the application of this concept in the Delta would permit a victory over the Viet Cong in that area without the necessity of a military confrontation.

The consequence is, after the overthrow of Diem and Nhu, that the Generals find themselves faced with a military problem of vast dimensions which they have not yet begun to tackle. It is not clear from discussions with them whether they feel confident that they can handle the military dimensions of this problem or whether that they hesitate to risk a catastrophe. They say that they expect to begin their campaign in the Southern provinces of the third corps area sometime after the middle of January. We will presumably have to wait until that time to see just what degree of conviction this intention actually entails.

At the current moment the situation in these several provinces has gone from bad to worse. Not only have the Viet Cong materially increased the strength of their forces in this area during the immunity allowed them

during the Diem/Nhu regime, but they have also profited from certain mistakes made by that regime. Foremost among these mistakes has been the misapplication of the strategic hamlet program in these provinces.

Rather than constructing a hamlet program in connection with a clear and hold military concept, Nhu directed the rapid elaboration of hamlets in this area in a sort of rapid sweep technique. Because of the nature of the terrain there was a great deal of relocation among families who lived independently near their rice fields. These families were swept up by a rapid military policing movement, concentrated into villages and required to construct the basic rudiments of a fortified strategic hamlet. They were then placed under the "protection" of Republican Youth Groups usually recruited from the central areas of the Country loyal to Diem and Nhu and were given to believe that they had achieved security by central government action. In actual fact they were disgruntled because they had been removed from their land, which they had to travel great distances to till, and were more than a little annoyed because the authority of their village elders and family seniors was usurped by young Republican Youth officials for whom they had no respect.

In great many instances, therefore, the strategic hamlets were destroyed not by action of the Viet Cong but by the inhabitants themselves. They tore down and burned the villages in which they had been relocated, scattered the Republican Youth and then returned to their land holdings. These disgruntled people have in many instances become assets to the Viet Cong. In any event, they are serious liabilities insofar as any new central government's policy is concerned.

Therefore, the Generals face the task not only of undertaking a serious military campaign for the first time in this Viet Cong stronghold but, moreover, of attempting to build Government confidence among a peasantry in which that confidence has been severely and bitterly shaken.

Compounding immeasurably the complications which the Generals face in the Delta region is the problem of the waterways. It seems clear from all the evidence which was presented in Saigon that the waterways served as a very significant measure of assistance to the Viet Cong. Not only is there considerable evidence of seaborne smuggling into the Mangrove areas at the mouth of the Delta, but also there is evidence of waterborne contraband traffic drifting down from Cambodia into the Viet Cong weapon caches in these provinces. Much of this contraband probably travels legitimately up the Mekong River from the sea in the bottoms of

sea-going vessels which have the international right to use this waterway without submission to Vietnamese Government control. Then, however, it is off-loaded (again legitimately) in Phnom Penh from which it is scattered into country boats which then move down the major waterways (illegally this time) bringing the contraband back into Viet Nam without adequate surveillance or control.

Moreover, the waterways seem to serve as the traffic arteries for movements of the Viet Cong formations in the paddy country. In many areas, particularly in the Plain of Reeds, the waterways are well overgrown and afford considerable camouflage for protection either from the air or from the lowlands. Again, through control of the waterways, the Viet Cong are able to exact taxes upon the movement of such commodities as rice, fish and charcoal. Vietnamese Government officials themselves ascertain that the Viet Cong extracts as much taxes on these three commodities in that area as does the Vietnamese Government on the same commodities.

Therefore, this People's Republic of Viet Cong is a well-established subsisting entity which probably pays its own way, even with regard to the war material which it imports from the outside world. Overlay maps showing the areas which the Viet Cong control in these provinces bear out the statement repeatedly made by General Don, Commander-in-Chief of the GVN forces, when he said that "We are like an expeditionary force in a hostile territory, holding only a few strong points and maintaining only a few main roads of communication".

This is the challenge which the Generals face in the new year and it is the problem upon which the prestige of the US will stand or fall not only in Viet Nam but in all Southeast Asia. I am convinced that Sihanouk's basic activation in his current frenetic phase derives from his conviction that the Viet Cong are winning in South Viet Nam. I am equally convinced that the Thai, the Burmese, the Indonesians, and others who are nervously awaiting the outcome of the forthcoming military action between the Government of Viet Nam and the People's Republic of Viet Cong will shape much of their future policy on the basis of this battle's outcome. I think we should in no way divert ourselves from the central significance of this one area and this one problem as the key to the entire future of the US position in Southeast Asia.

WHS

¹ Source: Library of Congress, Harriman Papers, Vietnam-Policy. Secret. William A. Harbin, Harriman's Staff Assistant, wrote the following note on the source text for Sullivan: "Gov thinks this very good, asks if we should do anything about it now, or just file it?" Sullivan indicated that it should be filed.

² Not printed.

³ Document 173.

⁴ Printed below.

⁵ Secret. Drafted on December 30.

383. Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs' Special Assistant (Jorden) to the Under Secretary (Harriman)¹

Washington, December 31, 1963.

SUBJECT

Some Observations on Viet Nam

The General Mood. The prevailing mood in Saigon, among Americans and Vietnamese, is considerably more pessimistic than I had expected. There is much skepticism about the present and much doubt about the future. One gets the impression of indecision and considerable floundering.

In part, the mood can be attributed to the too high expectations generated by the coup and the elimination of the Diem regime. All too many people thought that the end of Diem-Nhu rule would solve all their problems. It has not. In many important respects, the situation had worsened not improved, and this has come as a grave disappointment. On the American side, much of the current frustration has been produced by the failure of the new government to act decisively and of the U.S. authorities to stimulate, encourage and support decisive actions.

The abrupt exposure of the true situation that had developed throughout the country came as a surprise and shock to many Vietnamese and Americans. Heightened Viet Cong pressure after the coup only deepened the impression of failure and futility for many.

There has been all too much concentration on the sins and errors of the past. An inordinate amount of time and effort has gone into exposing, questioning and arresting individuals connected with the Diem regime. I speak here not of the most flagrant violations—murder, torture or large-scale extortion or graft—but of activities no more heinous than those involving some the individuals now in the new government.

This raking over the coals of the past has become a national pastime and it has helped to freeze most of the machinery of government. Old grudges are being evened through the medium of anonymous poison-pen letters regarding superiors and the campaign appears directed at all levels of authority—section chiefs, office directors, and ministers alike. As a

result, most individuals are concerned about their future and are unwilling to make decisions or to take action on anything but the most routine matters.

In short, there is a good deal of looking to the past and little looking to the future. One gets the impression that considerably more energy is being expended to "correct the evils of the Diem/Nhu regime" than to beating the Viet Cong. Some of the specific elements that contribute to the present low state of morale are covered in succeeding sections.

Neutrality. Talk of neutrality has spread like wildfire through the Vietnamese community. The N.Y Times editorial and Reston and Lippmann columns on the subject were a body blow to morale in Saigon. The equivocal U.S. stand regarding a conference on Cambodian neutrality took on ominous meaning for many Vietnamese. Even high officials asked: are we next? Rumors of French recognition of the Peiping regime added fuel to the flames. The withdrawal of some forces this month and the suggestion we might pull most of our troops out by the end of 1965 were read by some, however mistakenly, as forerunners of a sharp reduction in our commitment.

It is impossible to determine how many Vietnamese are thinking of neutrality as a possible solution to their problems. What is most depressing is the growing feeling among them that this may be U.S. policy and that they better be prepared for it. Recent assurances from us have doubtless helped ease the situation but much more needs to be done to counter this line which I gather is being quietly fostered by some of our European friends.

The press. The drab uniformity and tight controls that dominated the Vietnamese press under Diem have given way to irresponsibility and license under the new regime. New newspapers spring up almost daily. Most of them contain a heavy diet of rumor, scandal and personal vilification. They are further poisoning the atmosphere. Vietnamese with even the remotest connection with the old Government read the newspapers with trepidation about what might be written about them.

In part, fear of criticism in the foreign press has inclined the new government to lean over backwards as regards press freedom. Also, there is some suspicion that those with power over the press are using it selectively against preferred targets. In any case, the performance of the press has not improved matters greatly and some better balance between freedom and license is urgently needed.

The new leaders. One gets the impression of a group of largely honorable men, working hard and desperately looking for solutions to their country's problems. One also gets the impression of men largely unqualified by experience to deal with many of the problems facing them.

They are working overtime to preserve the essentials of collective leadership. They appear fearful of the consequences if they become torn by internal rivalries and the competition of cliques. They therefore spend an inordinate amount of time meeting together to keep each other informed of what is going on and to reach decisions collectively. Even relatively minor decisions occupy the time of the Revolutionary Committee. And the rest of the governmental machine awaits guidance from the committee before taking any action.

The Committee is reluctant to delegate authority; lower officials are reluctant to act on their own initiative. The result—stagnation.

Need for a Program. The new Government came into power with a fairly good idea of what it was against, what it didn't like about the former regime. But it has yet to produce any clearly defined program of action setting forth what it wants or what it proposes to do. Virtually nothing has come from the Revolutionary Committee that stirs enthusiasm and excitement, that could enlist the hearty support of its own people in Saigon or in the countryside, to say nothing of wooing adherents away from the Viet Cong.

The stock Vietnamese reply when this question is raised is to say: You Americans are too impatient. Yet talks with many Vietnamese made it quite clear that they, too, felt deeply the lack of a positive program of action aimed at bringing peace in freedom to their country.

Mobilization of Resources. The new authorities in Saigon have done fairly well in ridding the country of some of the deadwood of the past, of incompetents and lackeys whose only virtue was political conformity. But at the same time, they have failed to use fully some of the competence and skill available from the pre-November period. There has been a certain amount of change for the sake of change and consequent waste of experience.

Some people in the above category and others who might conceivably represent a threat in the future are being shipped abroad to relatively

unimportant posts. Others whose experience and training are desperately needed in Saigon are being permitted to go or to stay abroad.

Almost nothing has been done thus far to enlist the enthusiasm and support of the youth, many of whom are highly motivated. The idea of a domestic peace corps, for example, hasn't gotten off the ground. The one man who had made a deliberate effort to win the support of young people has been General Dinh, and there is some question as to his long-range purpose in this effort. Nor has there been any well-conceived effort to channel the energies and intelligence of the politically conscious religious groups, especially the young Buddhists.

All this represents a tragic waste of energy, talent and experience which a country like Viet Nam desperately needs. The danger is that those who want to help and who now feel left out will move in directions inimical to the major task facing their country, becoming a divisive rather than constructive force.

US-GVN Relations. The coup launched a new era in U.S. relations with the Vietnamese. No American's prestige is or has been higher than that of Ambassador Lodge. He is credited with encouraging the welcome change of November 1 and with having genuine sympathy for Viet Nam's problems. His word carries great weight and his advice is welcomed.

A very real problem, however, is that the Ambassador is one man and there are but 24 hours in a day. No one man can possibly keep abreast of the wide range of problems facing the new Government in Saigon and be prepared to offer constructive advice and suggestions on them. Moreover, the Vietnamese are extremely proud and they are not going to go to the American Embassy every hour or every day seeking ideas or advice.

Somehow, the gulf between their receptivity and our availability must be bridged.

Conclusions. There is a most serious morale problem in Viet Nam. There is some weariness and a diminution of optimism about the future. There is entirely too much preoccupation with the mistakes and wrongs of the past; too little action and planning aimed at the future.

Too much time, energy, experience, and drive is being wasted or ill-used. There is a lack of imagination in developing and presenting a program

that would capture the support of the people. There is some concern about U.S. policies and intentions and firmness. There is too cumbersome a machine for decision making. There is an absence of broad guidance from the center and, at the same time, too little willingness to encourage local initiative or, at the other end, to accept it.

There is a need for some immediate successes, however few and however modest. This would help alter the present mood of discouragement. But Viet Nam's needs and the promotion of our interests there call for actions that are both broader and deeper in scope than a few successful military actions in a war that is primarily social and political.

Some Suggestions for Action.

The most desperate need in Saigon right now is for clear, forceful and imaginative leadership. The second most urgent requirement is for an enlightened and thoughtful program that would capture the imagination and support of the people.

This is no time for traditional approaches or routine solutions. The situation is too important and too fragile. We are going to have to display great imagination and skill.

I see little prospect of meeting the current problem unless we do something: along the following lines:

We need a small team, perhaps six to eight men, who know the Viet Nam scene, have a real appreciation of the problems, who are totally devoted to the cause of preserving the country's independence, and who have demonstrated skill in working with the Vietnamese. They must have tact, patience and a passion for anonymity. They should be individuals who through past contacts have developed ties of trust and confidence with the Vietnamese.

These men should be assigned on a man-for-man basis to work with the leading figures in the present Government in Saigon-Minh, Tho, Kim, Don, Dinh, Oai, and possibly Xuan. They should be available 24 hours a day to give advice, advance ideas, make suggestions. They should work in closely coordinated fashion with common goals in mind and the advancement of our common policies as their main objective. One man should act as team director and coordinator and the entire operation should be under the close supervision of the Ambassador. The group

would carry out the Ambassador's directions and would keep him fully informed of all significant developments.

The most urgent requirements for such a group would be:

- to promote more clearly defined leadership, probably in the person of General Minh and possibly Tho;

- to encourage development of a thoughtful action program, with emphasis on political and social action;

- to take a hard look at existing programs and revise or eliminate as necessary;

- to win the support and cooperation of key elements—government officials, intellectuals, youth, religious groups, the peasants;

- to encourage initiative within the government and particularly at the province and district levels;

- to promote an amnesty for those who made mistakes under Diem—major crimes excepted—and to judge people on present and future performance;

- to shift emphasis from the defensive posture of the past to aggressive action against the enemy;

- to overhaul and revitalize the information and psychological programs directed at the people of South Viet Nam and at the Viet Cong.

As regards the kind of men who could carry out this kind of assignment with skill and imagination, I would suggest the following:

Ed Lansdale—he knows as much about Viet Nam, about this kind of political action and about the key figures in Saigon as almost any living American. He has prestige and influence with many of the central figures in the country. He has talents, clearly demonstrated in Viet Nam and the Philippines' which are urgently needed and which, in my opinion, we would waste only to our own disadvantage. In this critical situation, bureaucratic rivalries and jealousies must be forgotten. Ed can do a job that desperately needs doing.

Lou Conein—experienced and able, he has unparalleled standing with some of the generals, particularly Don; he is listened to with respect and can get things done.

Rufe Phillips—the key figure in the rural affairs program in Viet Nam, imaginative, energetic, and the confidant of such men as Kim and Tho.

Jim Kent—now in ISA, a military man with previous service in Viet Nam, quiet, solid, and with a deep understanding of what is going on; stands well with some of the generals now in power.

Joe Mendenhall—a political officer now in FE, knows Viet Nam, understands the Vietnamese, able and imaginative and devoted to Viet Nam's freedom.

These are but some of the men who come to mind for the kind of rough task I have outlined. There are others. The final choice should be the Ambassador's with the team leader, preferably Lansdale, having a voice in selection. Obviously, those picked for such a job would have to trust each other and work well together. And they would have to move forward with the greatest skill, finesse, and subtlety. It would be the most challenging kind of assignment—but it could mean the difference between success and failure. It is a risk worth taking.

¹ Source: Department of State, Vietnam Working Group Files: Lot 67 D 54, POL 1, General Political. Secret. A note on the source text indicates that it was Hilsman's copy. Hilsman in turn sent it to the Vietnam Working Group for action.

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