

IV.B Evolution of the War (26 Vols.)

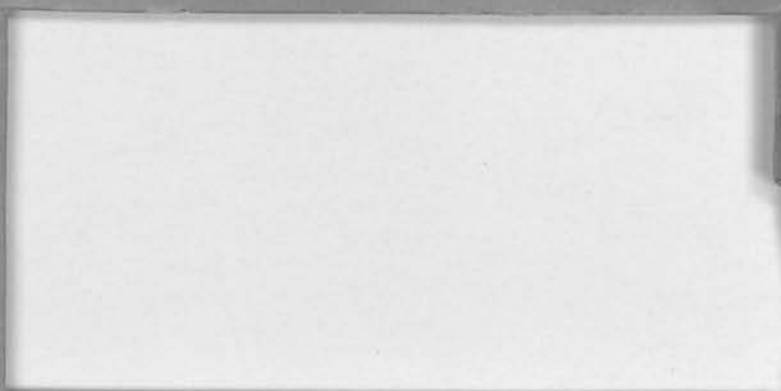
Counterinsurgency: The Kennedy Commitments, 1961-  
1963 (5 Vols.)

5. The Overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem, May-Nov, 1963

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**UNITED STATES - VIETNAM RELATIONS**  
**1945 - 1967**



**VIETNAM TASK FORCE**  
**OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**

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IV. B.5.

EVOLUTION OF THE WAR

The Overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem

May - November, 1963

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SUMMARY  
AND ANALYSIS

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SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The Diem coup was one of those critical events in the history of U.S. policy that could have altered our commitment. The choices were there: (1) continue to plod along in a limited fashion with Diem -- despite his and Nhu's growing unpopularity; (2) encourage or tacitly support the overthrow of Diem, taking the risk that the GVN might crumble and/or accommodate to the VC; and (3) grasp the opportunity -- with the obvious risks -- of the political instability in South Vietnam to disengage. The first option was rejected because of the belief that we could not win with Diem-Nhu. The third was never seriously considered a policy alternative because of the assumption that an independent, non-communist SVN was too important a strategic interest to abandon -- and because the situation was not sufficiently drastic to call into question so basic an assumption. The second course was chosen mainly for the reasons the first was rejected -- Vietnam was thought too important; we wanted to win; and the rebellious generals seemed to offer that prospect.

In making the choice to do nothing to prevent the coup and to tacitly support it, the U.S. inadvertently deepened its involvement. The inadvertence is the key factor. It was a situation without good alternatives. While Diem's government offered some semblance of stability and authority, its repressive actions against the Buddhists had permanently alienated popular support, with a high probability of victory for the Viet Cong. As efficient as the military coup leaders appeared, they were without a manageable base of political support. When they came to power and when the lid was taken off the Diem-Nhu reporting system, the GVN position was revealed as weak and deteriorating. And, by virtue of its interference in internal Vietnamese affairs, the U.S. had assumed a significant responsibility for the new regime, a responsibility which heightened our commitment and deepened our involvement.

The catalytic event that precipitated the protracted crisis which ended in the downfall of the Diem regime was a badly handled Buddhist religious protest in Hué on May 8, 1963. In and of itself the incident was hardly something to shake the foundations of power of most modern rulers, but the manner in which Diem responded to it, and the subsequent protests which it generated, was precisely the one most likely to aggravate not alleviate the situation. At stake, of course, was far more than a religious issue. The Buddhist protest had a profoundly political character from the beginning. It sprang and fed upon the feelings of political frustration and repression Diem's autocratic rule had engendered.

The beginning of the end for Diem can, then, be traced through events to the regime's violent suppression of a Buddhist protest demonstration in

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Hue on Buddha's birthday, May 8, in which nine people were killed and another fourteen injured. Although Buddhists had theretofore been wholly quiescent politically, in subsequent weeks, a full-blown Buddhist "struggle" movement demonstrated a sophisticated command of public protest techniques by a cohesive and disciplined organization, somewhat belying the notion that the movement was an outraged, spontaneous response to religious repression and discrimination. Nonetheless, by June it was clear that the regime was confronted not with a dissident religious minority, but with a grave crisis of public confidence. The Buddhist protest had become a vehicle for mobilizing the widespread popular resentment of an arbitrary and often oppressive rule. It had become the focal point of political opposition to Diem. Under strong U.S. pressure and in the face of an outraged world opinion, the regime reached ostensible agreement with the Buddhists on June 16. But the agreement merely papered over the crisis, without any serious concessions by Diem. This intransigence was reinforced by Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, and his wife, who bitterly attacked the Buddhists throughout the summer. By mid-August the crisis was reaching a breaking point.

The Buddhists' demonstrations and protest created a crisis for American policy as well. The U.S. policy of support for South Vietnam's struggle against the Hanoi-supported Viet Cong insurgency was founded on unequivocal support of Diem, whom the U.S. had long regarded as the only national leader capable of unifying his people for their internal war. When the Buddhist protest revealed widespread public disaffection, the U.S. made repeated attempts to persuade Diem to redress the Buddhist grievances, to repair his public image, and to win back public support. But the Ngos were unwilling to bend. Diem, in true mandarin style, was preoccupied with questions of face and survival -- not popular support. He did not understand the profound changes his country had experienced under stress, nor did he understand the requirement for popular support that the new sense of nationalism had created. The U.S. Ambassador, Frederick Nolting, had conducted a low-key diplomacy toward Diem, designed to bring him to the American way of thinking through reason and persuasion. He approached the regime during the first weeks of the Buddhist crisis in the same manner, but got no results. When he left on vacation at the end of May, his DCM, William Truehart, abandoned the soft sell for a tough line. He took U.S. views to Diem not as expressions of opinion, but as demands for action. Diem, however, remained as obdurate and evasive as ever. Not even the U.S. threat to dissociate itself from GVN actions in the Buddhist crisis brought movement.

In late June, with Nolting still on leave, President Kennedy announced the appointment of Henry Cabot Lodge as Ambassador to Vietnam to replace Nolting in September. In the policy deliberations then taking place in Washington, consideration was being given for the first time to what effect a coup against Diem would have. But Nolting returned, first to Washington and then to Saigon, to argue that the only alternative to Diem was chaos. The U.S. military too, convinced that the war effort was going well, felt that nothing should be done to upset the apple cart. So Nolting was given another chance to talk Diem into conciliating the Buddhists. The Ambassador worked assiduously at the task through July and the first part of August, but Diem would agree only to gestures and half-measures that could not

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stop the grave deterioration of the political situation. Nolting left Vietnam permanently in mid-August with vague assurances from Diem that he would seek to improve the climate of relations with the Buddhists. Less than a week later, Nolting was betrayed by Nhu's dramatic August 21 midnight raids on Buddhist pagodas throughout Vietnam

One of the important lessons of the American involvement in South Vietnam in support of Diem was that a policy of unreserved commitment to a particular leadership placed us in a weak and manipulable position on important internal issues. The view that there were "no alternatives" to Diem greatly limited the extent of our influence over the regime and ruled out over the years a number of kinds of leverage that we might usefully have employed or threatened to employ. Furthermore, it placed the U.S. in the unfortunate role of suitor to a fickle lover. Aware of our fundamental commitment to him, Diem could with relative impunity ignore our wishes. It reversed the real power relationship between the two countries. Coupled with Diem's persistent and ruthless elimination of all potential political opposition, it left us with rather stark alternatives indeed when a crisis on which we could not allow delay and equivocation finally occurred. For better or worse, the August 21 pagoda raids decided the issue for us.

The raids, themselves, were carefully timed by Nhu to be carried out when the U.S. was without an Ambassador, and only after a decree placing the country under military martial law had been issued. They were conducted by combat police and special forces units taking orders directly from Nhu, not through the Army chain of command. The sweeping attacks resulted in the wounding of about 30 monks, the arrest of over 1,400 Buddhists and the closing of the pagodas (after they had been damaged and looted in the raids). In their brutality and their blunt repudiation of Diem's solemn word to Nolting, they were a direct, impudent slap in the face for the U.S. Nhu expected that in crushing the Buddhists he could confront the new U.S. Ambassador with a fait accompli in which the U.S. would complainingly acquiesce, as we had in so many of the regime's actions which we opposed. Moreover, he attempted to fix blame for the raids on the senior Army generals. Getting word of the attacks in Honolulu, where he was conferring with Nolting and Hilsman, Lodge flew directly to Saigon. He immediately let it be known that the U.S. completely dissociated itself from the raids and could not tolerate such behavior. In Washington the morning after, while much confusion reigned about who was responsible for the raids, a statement repudiating them was promptly released. Only after several days did the U.S. finally establish Nhu's culpability in the attacks and publicly exonerate the Army.

On August 23, the first contact with a U.S. representative was made by generals who had begun to plan a coup against Diem. The generals wanted a clear indication of where the U.S. stood. State in its subsequently controversial reply, drafted and cleared on a weekend when several of the principal Presidential advisors were absent from Washington, affirmed that Nhu's continuation in a power position within the regime was intolerable

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and, if after Diem had been given an opportunity to rid himself of Nhu and did not, "then, we must face the possibility that Diem himself cannot be preserved." This message was to be communicated to the generals, and Diem was to be warned that Nhu must go. Lodge agreed with the approach to the generals, but felt it was futile to present Diem with an ultimatum he would only ignore and one that might tip off the palace to the coup plans. Lodge proceeded to inform only the generals. They were told that the U.S. could no longer support a regime which included Nhu, but that keeping Diem was entirely up to them. This was communicated to the generals on August 27. The President and some of his advisors, however, had begun to have second thoughts about switching horses so suddenly, and with so little information on whether the coup could succeed, and if it did, what kind of government it would bring to power. As it turned out, Washington's anxiety was for naught, the plot was premature, and after several uncertain days, its demise was finally recognized on August 31.

Thus by the end of August, we found ourselves without a leadership to support and without a policy to follow in our relations with the GVN. In this context a month-long policy review took place in Washington and in Vietnam. It was fundamentally a search for alternatives. In both places the issue was joined between those who saw no realistic alternatives to Diem and felt that his policies were having only a marginal effect on the war effort, which they wanted to get on with by renewing our support and communication with Diem; and those who felt that the war against the VC would not possibly be won with Diem in power and preferred therefore to push for a coup of some kind. The first view was primarily supported by the military and the CIA both in Saigon and in Washington, while the latter was held by the U.S. Mission, the State Department and members of the White House staff. In the end, a third alternative was selected, namely to use pressure on Diem to get him to remove Nhu from the scene and to end his repressive policies. Through September, however, the debate continued with growing intensity. Tactical considerations, such as another Lodge approach to Diem about removing the Nhus and the effect of Senator Church's resolution calling for an aid suspension, focused the discussion at times, but the issue of whether to renew our support for Diem remained. The decision hinged on the assessment of how seriously the political deterioration was affecting the war effort.

In the course of these policy debates, several participants pursued the logical but painful conclusion that if the war could not be won with Diem, and if his removal would lead to political chaos and also jeopardize the war effort, then the war was probably unwinnable. If that were the case, the argument went, then the U.S. should really be facing a more basic decision on either an orderly disengagement from an irretrievable situation, or a major escalation of the U.S. involvement, including the use of U.S. combat troops. These prophetic minority voices were, however, raising an unpleasant prospect that the Administration was unprepared to face at that time. In hindsight, however, it is clear that this was one of the times in the history of our Vietnam involvement when we were making fundamental choices. The option to disengage honorably at that time now appears an attractively low-cost one. But for the Kennedy Administration



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then, the costs no doubt appeared much higher. In any event, it proved to be unwilling to accept the implications of predictions for a bleak future. The Administration hewed to the belief that if the U.S. be but willing to exercise its power, it could ultimately always have its way in world affairs.

Nonetheless, in view of the widely divergent views of the principals in Saigon, the Administration sought independent judgments with two successive fact-finding missions. The first of these whirlwind inspections, by General Victor Krulak, JCS SACSA, and a State Department Vietnam expert, Joseph Mendenhall, from September 7-10, resulted in diametrically opposing reports to the President on the conditions and situation and was, as a result, futile. The Krulak-Mendenhall divergence was significant because it typifies the deficient analysis of both the U.S. civilian and military missions in Vietnam with respect to the overall political situation in the country. The U.S. civilian observers, for their part, failed to fully appreciate the impact Diem had had in preventing the emergence of any other political forces. The Buddhists, while a cohesive and effective minority protest movement, lacked a program or the means to achieve power. The labor unions were entirely urban-based and appealed to only a small segment of the population. The clandestine political parties were small, urban, and usually elitist. The religious sects had a narrow appeal and were based on ethnic minorities. Only the Viet Cong had any real support and influence on a broad base in the countryside. The only real alternative source of political power was the Army since it had a large, disciplined organization spanning the country, with an independent communications and transportation system and a strong superiority to any other group in coercive power. In its reports on the Army, however, General Harkins and the U.S. military had failed to appreciate the deeply corrosive effect on internal allegiance and discipline in the Army that Diem's loyalty based promotion and assignment policies had had. They did not foresee that in the wake of a coup senior officers would lack the cohesiveness to hang together and that the temptations of power would promote a divisive internal competition among ambitious men at the expense of the war against the Viet Cong.

Two weeks after the fruitless Krulak-Mendenhall mission, with the Washington discussions still stalemated, it was the turn of Secretary McNamara and General Taylor, the Chairman of the JCS, to assess the problem. They left for Vietnam on September 23 with the Presidential instruction to appraise the condition of the war effort and the impact on it of the Buddhist political turmoil and to recommend a course of action for the GVN and the U.S. They returned to Washington on October 2. Their report was a somewhat contradictory compromise between the views of the civilian and military staffs. It affirmed that the war was being won, and that it would be successfully concluded in the first three corps areas by the end of 1964, and in the Delta by 1965, thereby permitting the withdrawal of American advisors, although it noted that the political tensions were starting to have an adverse effect on it. But, more importantly, it recommended a series of measures to coerce Diem into compliance with American wishes that included a selective suspension of U.S. economic aid, an end to aid for the special forces units used in the August 21 raids unless they were subordinated to the Joint General Staff, and the continuation of Lodge's cool official aloofness from the regime. It recommended the public

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announcement of the U.S. intention to withdraw 1,000 troops by the end of the year, but suggested that the aid suspensions not be announced in order to give Diem a chance to respond without a public loss of face. It concluded by recommending against active U.S. encouragement of a coup, in spite of the fact that an aid suspension was the one step the generals had asked for in August as a sign of U.S. condemnation of Diem and support for a change of government. The report was quickly adopted by Kennedy in the NSC and a brief, and subsequently much ruder, statement was released to the press on October 2, announcing the planned withdrawal of 1,000 troops by year's end.

The McNamara-Taylor mission, like the Krulak-Mendenhall mission before it and the Honolulu Conference in November after the coup, points up the great difficulty encountered by high level fact-finding missions and conferences in getting at the "facts" of a complex policy problem like Vietnam in a short time. It is hard to believe that hasty visits by harried high level officials with overloaded itineraries really add much in the way of additional data or lucid insight. And because they become a focal point of worldwide press coverage, they often raise public expectations or anxieties that may only create additional problems for the President. There were many such high level conferences over Vietnam.

Of the recommendations of the McNamara-Taylor mission, the proposal for a selective suspension of economic aid, in particular the suspension of the commercial import program, was the most significant both in terms of its effect, and as an example of the adroit use or denial of American assistance to achieve our foreign policy objectives. In this instance economic sanctions, in the form of selected aid suspensions in those programs to which the regime would be most sensitive but that would have no immediate adverse effect on the war effort, were used constructively to influence events rather than negatively to punish those who had violated our wishes, our usual reaction to coups in Latin America. The proposal itself had been under consideration since the abortive coup plot of August. At that time, Lodge had been authorized to suspend aid if he thought it would enhance the likelihood of the success of a coup. Later in September he was again given specific control over the delay or suspension of any of the pending aid programs. On both occasions, however, he had expressed doubt about the utility of such a step. In fact, renewal of the commercial import program had been pending since early in September, so that the adoption of the McNamara-Taylor proposal merely formalized the existing situation into policy. As might have been expected (although the record leaves ambiguous whether this was a conscious aim of the Administration), the Vietnamese generals interpreted the suspension as a green light to proceed with a coup.

While this policy was being applied in October, Lodge shunned all contact with the regime that did not come at Diem's initiative. He wanted it clearly understood that they must come to him prepared to adopt our advice before he would recommend to Washington a change in U.S. policy. Lodge performed with great skill, but inevitably frictions developed within

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the Mission as different viewpoints and proposals came forward. In particular, Lodge's disagreements and disputes with General Harkins during October when the coup plot was maturing and later were to be of considerable embarrassment to Washington when they leaked to the press. Lodge had carefully cultivated the press, and when the stories of friction appeared, it was invariably Harkins or Richardson or someone else who was the villain.

No sooner had the McNamara-Taylor mission returned to Washington and reported its recommendations than the generals reopened contact with the Mission indicating that once again they were preparing to strike against the regime. Washington's immediate reaction on October 5 was to reiterate the decision of the NSC on the McNamara-Taylor report, i.e., no U.S. encouragement of a coup. Lodge was instructed, however, to maintain contact with the generals and to monitor their plans as they emerged. These periodic contacts continued and by October 25, Lodge had come to believe that Diem was unlikely to respond to our pressure and that we should therefore not thwart the coup forces. Harkins disagreed, believing that we still had not given Diem a real chance to rid himself of Nhu and that we should present him with such an ultimatum and test his response before going ahead with a coup. He, furthermore, had reservations about the strength of the coup forces when compared with those likely to remain loyal to the regime. All this left Washington anxious and doubtful. Lodge was cautioned to seek fuller information on the coup plot, including a line-up of forces and the proposed plan of action. The U.S. could not base its policy on support for a coup attempt that did not offer a strong prospect of success. Lodge was counseled to consider ways of delaying or preventing the coup if he doubted its prospects for success. By this juncture, however, Lodge felt committed and, furthermore, felt the matter was no longer in our hands. The generals were taking the action on their own initiative and we could only prevent it now by denouncing them to Diem. While this debate was still going on, the generals struck.

Shortly after Ambassador Lodge and Admiral Felt had called on Diem on November 1, the generals made their move, culminating a summer and fall of complex intrigue. The coup was led by General Minh, the most respected of the senior generals, together with Generals Don, Kim and Khiem. They convoked a meeting of all but a few senior officers at JGS headquarters at noon on the day of the coup, announced their plans and got the support of their compatriots. The coup itself was executed with skill and swiftness. They had devoted special attention to ensuring that the major potentially loyal forces were isolated and their leaders neutralized at the outset of the operation. By the late afternoon of November 1, only the palace guard remained to defend the two brothers. At 4:30 p.m., Diem called Lodge to ask where the U.S. stood. Lodge was noncommittal and confined himself to concern for Diem's physical safety. The conversation ended inconclusively. The generals made repeated calls to the palace offering the brothers safe conduct out of the country if they surrendered, but the two held out hope until the very end. Sometime that evening they secretly slipped out of the palace through an underground escape passage and went to a hide-away in Cholon. There they were captured the following morning after their whereabouts was learned when the palace fell. Shortly the two brothers were murdered in the back of an armored personnel carrier en route to JGS headquarters.

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Having successfully carried off their coup, the generals began to make arrangements for a civilian government. Vice President Tho was named to head a largely civilian cabinet, but General Minh became President and Chairman of the shadow Military Revolutionary Council. After having delayed an appropriate period, the U.S. recognized the new government on November 8. As the euphoria of the first days of liberation from the heavy hand of the Diem regime wore off, however, the real gravity of the economic situation and the lack of expertise in the new government became apparent to both Vietnamese and American officials. The deterioration of the military situation and the strategic hamlet program also came more and more clearly into perspective.

These topics dominated the discussions at the Honolulu Conference on November 20 when Lodge and the country team met with Rusk, McNamara, Taylor, Bell, and Bundy. But the meeting ended inconclusively. After Lodge had conferred with the President a few days later in Washington, the White House tried to pull together some conclusions and offer some guidance for our continuing and now deeper involvement in Vietnam. The instructions contained in NSAM 273, however, did not reflect the truly dire situation as it was to come to light in succeeding weeks. The reappraisals forced by the new information would swiftly make it irrelevant as it was "overtaken by events."

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

CHRONOLOGY

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CHRONOLOGY

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
8 May 1963	Hue incident	Government troops fire on a Buddhist protest demonstration, killing nine and wounding fourteen. The incident triggers a nationwide Buddhist protest and a crisis of popular confidence for the Diem regime. GVN maintains the incident was an act of VC terrorism.
10 May 1963	Manifesto of Buddhist clergy	A five point demand by the Buddhist clergy is transmitted to the Government. It calls for freedom to fly the Buddhist flag, legal equality with the Catholic Church, an end of arrests, punishment of the perpetrators of the May 8 incident, and indemnification of its victims.
18 May 1963	Nolting meeting with Diem; Embassy Saigon message 1038	U.S. Ambassador Nolting meets with Diem and outlines the steps the U.S. wants Diem to take to redress the Buddhist grievances and recapture public confidence. These include an admission of responsibility for the Hue incident, compensation of the victims, and a reaffirmation of religious equality and non-discrimination.
30 May 1963	Buddhist demonstration	350 Buddhist monks demonstrate in front of the National Assembly and announce a 48-hour hunger strike.
4 Jun 1963	Truehart meeting with Thuan	With Nolting on leave, chargé d'affaires Truehart meets with Secretary of State Thuan, and on instruction from the State Department, warns that U.S. support for the GVN could not be maintained if there were another bloody suppression of Buddhists.
	The committee appointed	Later that day the Government announces the appointment of an inter-ministerial committee headed by Vice President Tho to resolve the religious issue.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
5 Jun 1963	Tho committee meets Buddhists	The first meeting between the Tho committee and the Buddhist leadership takes place, after which each side publicly questions the other's good faith in the negotiations.
8 Jun 1963	Madame Nhu attacks Buddhists	Madame Nhu, wife of Diem's powerful brother, publicly accuses the Buddhists of being infiltrated with communist agents.  Later on the same day, Truehart protests Mme Nhu's remarks to Diem and threatens to dissociate the U.S. from any future repressive measures against the Buddhists.
11 Jun 1963	First Buddhist suicide by fire	At noon in the middle of a downtown intersection, a Buddhist monk, Thich Quang Duc, is immersed in gasoline and sets himself afire. His fiery protest suicide is photographed and is front page material in the world's newspapers. Shock and indignation are universal. Mme Nhu subsequently refers to it as a "barbecue."
12 Jun 1963	Truehart repeats U.S. dissociation threat	Truehart sees Diem again to protest his lack of action on the Buddhist problem and says that Quang Duc's suicide has shocked the world. If Diem does not act, the U.S. will be forced to dissociate itself from him.
14 Jun 1963	Tho committee meets again with Buddhists	Under U.S. pressure, negotiations between Vice President Tho's committee and the Buddhist leadership reopen in apparent earnest.
16 Jun 1963	GVN-Buddhist communique	A joint GVN-Buddhist communique is released as a product of the negotiations that outlines the elements of a settlement, but affixes no responsibility for the May 8 Hue incident.

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Late June- July	Buddhist protest intensifies	Buddhists protest activities intensify as leadership passes from the discredited moderate, older leaders to younger militants. The Saigon press corps is actively cultivated.
27 Jun 1963	Kennedy announces Lodge appointment	President Kennedy, visiting in Ireland, announces the appointment of Henry Cabot Lodge as the new U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, effective in September.
3 Jul 1963	Tho committee absolves regime	Vice President Tho's committee announces that a preliminary investigation of the May 8 incident has confirmed that the deaths were the result of an act of VC terrorism.
4 Jul 1963	White House meeting on Vietnamese situation	At a State Department briefing for the President it is generally agreed that Diem will not voluntarily remove Nhu. A discussion of the likely consequences of a coup reveals divergent views.
5 Jul 1963	Nolting in Washington	Having cut short his vacation to return to Washington for consultations, Nolting confers with Under Secretary of State George Ball and voices the fear that an attempt to overthrow Diem would result in a protracted religious civil war that would open the door to the Viet Cong. We should not abandon Diem yet. While in Washington he also sees Secretary McNamara.
10 Jul 1963	SNIE 53-2-63	This special intelligence estimate notes coup rumors in Vietnam and warns that a coup would disrupt the war effort and perhaps give the Viet Cong the opportunity for gains they had been hoping for. It concludes, however, that if Diem does nothing to implement the June 16 agreements, Buddhist unrest will continue through the summer and increase the likelihood of a coup attempt.



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11 Jul 1963	Nolting's return to Saigon	Nolting returns to Vietnam with Washington's blessing to make one last attempt to persuade Diem to conciliate the Buddhists. The hope is to draw on the good will that Nolting has built up in his two years of service.
	Nhu squelches coup plotting	At a special meeting for all senior generals, Nhu attacks their loyalty to the regime for not having thwarted the numerous coup plots that had been reported. The meeting apparently forestalls any immediate threat to the family.
15 Jul 1963	Embassy Saigon message 85	Deeply resentful of Truohart's tough pressure tactics, Nolting meets with Diem and attempts to mollify him. He convinces Diem to make a nationwide radio address with concessions to the Buddhists.
19 Jul 1963	Diem speaks on radio	Complying with the letter but not the spirit of Nolting's request, Diem delivers a brief cold radio address that makes only very minor concessions to the Buddhists and asks for harmony and support of the Government.
	McNamara press conference	At a press conference, Secretary McNamara says the war is progressing well and the Buddhist crisis has not yet affected it.
5 Aug 1963	Second Buddhist suicide	A second Buddhist monk commits suicide by burning himself to death in the continuing protest against the Diem regime.
14 Aug 1963	Nolting-Diem meeting	In their final meeting before Nolting's departure from Vietnam, Diem promises to make a public statement repudiating Mme Nhu's inflammatory denunciations of the Buddhists. Nolting left the next day.
15 Aug 1963	<u>New York Herald Tribune</u> article by Marguerite Higgins	Diem's promised public statement takes the form of an interview with Marguerite Higgins, conservative correspondent

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		of the <u>New York Herald Tribune</u> . Diem asserts that conciliation has been his policy toward the Buddhists all along and the family is pleased with Lodge's appointment.
18 Aug 1963	Generals decide on martial law	Ten senior Army generals meet and decide that in view of the deteriorating political situation, they will ask Diem for a declaration of martial law to permit them to return monks from outside Saigon to their own provinces and pagodas and thus reduce tensions in the capital.
20 Aug 1963	Generals propose martial law to Nhu and Diem	A small group of generals meets first with Nhu and then with Diem to propose that martial law be decreed forthwith. Diem approves the proposal and the decree takes effect at midnight.
21 Aug 1963	Nhu's forces attack pagodas	Under the cover of the military martial law, shortly after midnight, forces loyal to Nhu and under his orders attack pagodas throughout Vietnam, arresting monks and sacking the sacred buildings. Over 30 Buddhists are injured and over 1400 arrested. The attack is a shattering repudiation of Diem's promises to Nolting. The Embassy is taken by surprise.
	Lodge confers with Nolting and Hilsman	First news of the attacks reaches Lodge in Honolulu where he is conferring with Nolting and Assistant Secretary of State Hilsman. He is dispatched immediately to Vietnam.
	Washington reaction	At 9:30 a.m. a stiff statement is released by State deploring the raids as a direct violation of Diem's assurances to the U.S. But first intelligence places the blame for them on the Army, not Nhu.
22 Aug 1963	Lodge arrives in Saigon	After a brief stop in Tokyo, Lodge arrives in Saigon at 9:30 p.m. The situation still remains confused.

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23 Aug 1963	CIA Information Report TDCS DB-3/656, 252	General Don, armed forces commander under the martial law decree, has contacted a CAS officer and asked why the U.S. was broadcasting the erroneous story that the Army had conducted the pagoda raids. Nhu's special forces were responsible. The U.S. should make its position known. A separate contact by another general with a member of the mission had brought another inquiry as to the U.S. position. The query is clear. Would we support the Army if it acted against Nhu and/or Diem?
	Student demonstrations	Large student protest demonstrations on behalf of the imprisoned Buddhists take place at the faculties of medicine and pharmacy at the University of Saigon. They are a dramatic break with the tradition of student apathy to politics in Vietnam. The regime reacts with massive arrests.
24 Aug 1963	Embassy Saigon message 316, Lodge to Hilsman	Lodge lays the blame for the raids at Nhu's feet and states that his influence is significantly increased. But, in view of the loyalty of Saigon area commanders, a coup attempt would be a "shot in the dark."
	State message 243, State to Lodge	Subsequently known as the "Aug 24 cable," this controversial message acknowledges Nhu's responsibility for the raids and says that U.S. can no longer tolerate his continuation in power. If Diem is unable or unwilling to remove him, the generals are to be told that the U.S. will be prepared to discontinue economic and military support, accept the obvious implication and will promise assistance to them in any period of interim breakdown of the GVN. Lodge's permission is requested for a VOA broadcast exonerating the Army of responsibility for the Aug 21 raids.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
25 Aug 1963	Embassy Saigon message	Lodge approves the proposed course of action but sees no reason to approach Diem first. Diem will not remove the Nhus and it would merely tip off the palace to the impending military action.
	CAS Saigon message 0292	Lodge, Harkins, and Richardson meet and agree on an approach to the generals with the information in State's 243.
26 Aug 1963	VOA broadcast	Early on this Monday morning, VOA in South Vietnam broadcasts the press stories placing blame for the Aug 21 raids on Nhu and absolving the Army. It also broadcast press speculation that the U.S. is contemplating an aid suspension.
	Lodge presents credentials to Diem	Later the same morning, Lodge presents his credentials to Diem, after an early morning meeting with Harkins and Richardson, at which they agree on the details of the approach to the generals.
	NSC meeting	The Aug 24 cable of instructions had been drafted, cleared and sent on a weekend with McNamara, McCone, Rusk and the President all out of town. The NSC meeting on Monday morning reveals that these top advisors have reservations about proceeding hastily with a coup when we lack so much basic information about its leadership and chances. Lodge is asked for more details.
27 Aug 1963	CAS agents meet generals	CAS agents Conein and Spera meet with Generals Khiem and Khanh respectively. Khiem tells Conein that other participants are Generals Minh, Kim, Thieu and Le, and that General Don was aware of the plot and approved, but was too exposed to participate.
	Embassy Saigon message 364	Lodge gives an optimistic appraisal of the balance of forces for a coup and expresses confidence in the identified leaders.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
	NSC meeting	At the now daily NSC meetings in Washington, the State Department participants generally favor going ahead with the coup, while the Defense Department, both civilian and military, prefers another try with Diem.
28 Aug 1963	MACV message 1557	Harkins goes on record with doubts about the line-up of forces for the coup and sees no reason for our "rush approval."
	State message 269, President to Lodge; and JCS message 3385, Taylor to Harkins	Concerned by the differing views of Lodge and Harkins, as well as the division of opinion in Washington, the President asks the Ambassador and MACV for their separate appraisals.
29 Aug 1963	CAS agents meet Minh	At this meeting, arranged by Minh, he asks for clear evidence that the U.S. will not betray them to Nhu. He is unwilling to discuss the details of his plan. When asked what would constitute a sign of U.S. support, he replies that the U.S. should suspend economic aid to the regime.
	Embassy Saigon message 375	Lodge replies to the Presidential query that the U.S. is irrevocably committed to the generals. He recommends showing the CAS messages to them to establish our good faith and if that is insufficient, he recommends a suspension of economic aid as they requested.
	MACV message 1566	Harkins reply to Taylor suggests that one last effort be made with Diem in the form of an ultimatum demanding Nhu's removal. Such a move he feels will strengthen the hand of the generals, not imperil them.
	NSC meeting	Another inconclusive meeting is held with the division of opinion on a U.S. course of action still strong. The result is to leave policy making in Lodge's hands.
	State message 272	Lodge is authorized to have Harkins show the CAS messages to the generals

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		in exchange for a look at their detailed plans. He is further authorized to suspend U.S. aid at his discretion.
31 Aug 1963	MACV message 1583; Embassy Saigon message 391; and CAS Saigon message 0499	Harkins meets with Khiem who tells him that Minh has called off the coup. Military was unable achieve a favorable balance of forces in the Saigon area and doubts about whether the U.S. had leaked their plans to Nhu were the deciding factors. A future attempt is not ruled out.
	NSC meeting; MGen Victor C. Krulak, Memo for the Record, Vietnam Meeting at the State Dept.	With the demise of the coup plot confirmed, the NSC (without the President) meets to try to chart a new policy for Vietnam. The discussion reveals the divergence between the military desire to get on with the war and repair relations with Diem, and the State Department view that continued support for Diem will eventually mean a loss of the war as more and more of the South Vietnamese are alienated from it. No decisions are taken.
2 Sep 1963	Kennedy TV interview	The President, in a TV interview with CBS News' Walter Cronkite, expresses his disappointment with Diem's handling of the Buddhist crisis and concern that a greater effort is needed by the GVN to win popular support. This can be done, he feels, "with change in policy and perhaps with personnel..."
	Lodge meets with Nhu	Avoiding any contact with Diem, Lodge nonetheless meets with Nhu who announces his intention to quit the Government as a sign of the progress of the campaign against the VC. Mme Nhu and Archbishop Thuc, another of Diem's brothers, are to leave the country on extended trips shortly.
6 Sep 1963	NSC meeting	The NSC decides to instruct Lodge to reopen "tough" negotiations with Diem and to start by clarifying to him the

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		U.S. position. Robert Kennedy speculates that if the war can be won neither with Diem nor in the event of a disruptive coup, we should perhaps be considering a U.S. disengagement. Secretary McNamara proposes a fact-finding trip by General Krulak, and State suggests including Joseph Mendenhall, a senior FSO with Vietnam experience. They leave later the same day.
7 Sep 1963	Archbishop Thuc leaves Vietnam	With the intercession of the Vatican and the Papal Delegate in Saigon, Archbishop Thuc leaves the country for Rome on an extended visit.
8 Sep 1963	AID Director Bell TV interview	In a televised interview, AID Director Bell expresses concern that Congress might cut aid to South Vietnam if the Diem Government does not change its repressive policies.
9 Sep 1963	Mme Nhu leaves Vietnam	Mme Nhu departs from Saigon to attend the World Parliamentarians Conference in Belgrade and then to take an extended trip through Europe and possibly the U.S.
	Kennedy TV interview	Appearing on the inaugural program of the NBC Huntley-Brinkley News, the President says he does not believe an aid cut-off would be helpful in achieving American purposes in Vietnam at present.
10 Sep 1963	NSC meeting	Krulak and Mendenhall return from Vietnam after a whirlwind four day trip and make their report to the NSC. With them are John Mecklin, USIS Director in Saigon, and Rufus Phillips, USOM's Director of Rural Programs. Krulak's report stresses that the war is being won and, while there is some dissatisfaction in the military with Diem, no one would risk his neck to remove him. A continuation of present policies under Diem

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		will yield victory. Mendenhall presents a completely contradictory view of the situation. A breakdown of civil administration was possible and a religious civil war could not be excluded if Diem was not replaced. The war certainly could not be won with Diem. Phillips and Mecklin support Mendenhall with variations. Nolting agrees with Krulak. All the disagreement prompts the President to ask the two emissaries, "You two did visit the same country, didn't you?"
11 Sep 1963	Embassy Saigon message 478	Lodge reverses himself in suggesting a complete study of kinds of economic aid suspension that might be used to topple the regime.
	White House meeting	White House decides to hold economic aid renewal in abeyance pending a complete examination of how it might be used to pressure Diem.
12 Sep 1963	Senator Church's Resolution	With White House approval, Senator Church introduces a resolution in the Senate condemning the South Vietnamese Government for its repressive handling of the Buddhist problem and calling for an end to U.S. aid unless the repressions are abandoned.
14 Sep 1963	State message 411	Lodge is informed that approval of the \$18.5 million commercial import program is deferred until basic policy decisions on Vietnam have been made.
16 Sep 1963	Martial law ends	Martial law is ended throughout the country.
17 Sep 1963	NSC meeting	Two alternative proposals for dealing with Diem are considered. The first would use an escalatory set of pressures to get him to do our bidding. The second would involve acquiescence in recent GVN actions, recognition that Diem and Nhu are inseparable, and an attempt to salvage as much as possible from a bad situation. A decision is



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		taken to adopt the first as policy, and also to send Secretary McNamara and General Taylor on a fact-gathering mission.
21 Sep 1963	White House press release	The forthcoming McNamara-Taylor mission is announced to the press by the White House.
	White House instructions to McNamara-Taylor	The White House instructions for the mission ask the two men to (1) appraise the status of the military effort; (2) assess the impact on the war effort of the Buddhist crisis; (3) recommend a course of action for the GVN to redress the problem and for the U.S. to get them to do it; and (4) examine how our aid can further no. 3.
23 Sep 1963	McNamara-Taylor mission departs	The McNamara-Taylor party leaves Washington for its ten day trip to Vietnam.
25 Sep 1963	Opening meeting of McNamara-Taylor with country team	The disagreement between Harkins and Lodge about the situation in-country and the progress of the war surfaces immediately in this first conference. McNamara spends several subsequent days touring various parts of Vietnam to appraise the war first hand and talk with U.S. and Vietnamese officers.
27 Sep 1963	National Assembly elections	As announced earlier, and at the end of a pro forma one week campaign, the GVN holds nation-wide elections for the National Assembly with predictably high turnouts and majorities for Government candidates.
	Embassy Saigon messages 602 and 608	Aware that McNamara and Taylor are tasked to recommend uses of the aid program to pressure Diem, both Lodge and Brent, the USOM Director, go on record against them.
29 Sep 1963	McNamara, Taylor and Lodge see Diem	In their protocol call on Diem, and after his two-hour monologue, McNamara is able to pointedly stress that the political unrest and Government repressive measures against the Buddhists

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		were undermining the U.S. war effort. Diem seems unimpressed, but does ask Taylor for his appraisal, as a military man, of the progress of the war.
30 Sep 1963	McNamara, Taylor and Lodge meet Vict President Tho	Tho stresses to the two visitors the gravity of the political deterioration and the negative effect it was having on war. He questions the success of the strategic hamlet program. Later that day, the McNamara-Taylor party leaves South Vietnam for Honolulu.
2 Oct 1963	SecDef Memo for the President: Report of the McNamara-Taylor mission	After a day in Honolulu to prepare a report, McNamara and Taylor return to Washington and present their findings and recommendations to a morning NSC meeting. Their long report represents a compromise between the military and the civilian views. It confirms the progress of the war, but warns of the dangers inherent in the current political turmoil and recommends pressures against Diem to bring changes. Militarily, it calls for greater GVN effort, especially in the Delta and in clear and hold operations, and a consolidation of the strategic hamlet program. It proposes the announcement of the plans to withdraw 1,000 American troops by year's end. To put political pressure on Diem to institute the reforms we want, it recommends a selective aid suspension, an end of support for the special forces responsible for the pagoda raids, and a continuation of Lodge's aloofness from the regime. It recommends against a coup, but qualifies this by suggesting that an alternative leadership be identified and cultivated. The recommendations are promptly approved by the President.
	White House press release	A statement following the meeting is released as recommended by McNamara and Taylor that reiterates the U.S. commitment to the struggle against the VC, announces the 1,000 man troop

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		withdrawal, and dissociates the U.S. from Diem's repressive policies. It does not, however, announce the aid suspensions.
	CAS Saigon message .1385	CAS agent Conein "accidentally" meets General Don at Tan Son Nhut. Don asks him to come to Nha Trang that evening. With Embassy approval Conein keeps the appointment. Don states that there is an active plot among the generals for a coup, and that General Minh wants to see Conein on Oct 5 to discuss details. The key to the plan, according to Don, is the conversion of III Corps Commander, General Dinh.
5 Oct 1963	NSC meeting	The President approves detailed recommendations of the McNamara-Taylor mission for transmission to Lodge.
	CAP message 63560	"...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...to identify and build contacts with possible alternative leadership as and when it appears."
	CAS Saigon message .1445	With Lodge's approval, and probably before receipt of foregoing message, Conein meets with General Minh. Minh says he must know the U.S. position on a coup in the near future. The GVN's loss of popular support is endangering the whole war effort. Three possible plans are mentioned, one involving assassination. Conein is non-committal.

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	CAS Saigon message 34026	Lodge recommends that when Conein is contacted again, he be authorized to say that the U.S. will not thwart a coup, that we are willing to review plans, and that we will continue support to a successor regime.
	Richardson recalled	His identity having been compromised in recent press stories about internal policy struggles in the U.S. mission, CIA Chief of Station, John Richardson, is recalled to Washington.
6 Oct 1963	CAP message 63560	Washington clarifies its views on a coup by stating that the U.S. will not thwart such a move if it offers prospects of a more effective fight against the VC. Security and deniability of all contacts is paramount.
7 Oct 1963	National Assembly convenes	The newly elected National Assembly convenes to hear Diem's State of the Union address. Diem speaks mainly of Vietnam's past progress under his rule, playing down the current political crisis and making only scant reference to U.S. aid.
	Mme Nhu arrives in U.S.	Mme Nhu arrives in the U.S. from Europe for a three-week speaking tour. She immediately launches into vituperative attacks on the U.S. and its role in Vietnam.
8 Oct 1963	UN General Assembly vote	The UN General Assembly, after a strong debate with many voices denouncing Diem's anti-Buddhist policy, votes to send a fact-finding team to Saigon to investigate the charges of repression.

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<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT OR DOCUMENT</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
10 Oct 1963	CAS officer meets Minh	A CAS officer reportedly meets with Minh and conveys the U.S. position that it will neither encourage nor thwart a coup attempt, but would hope to be informed about it.
17 Oct 1963	GVN informed of aid cut-off to special forces	Acting for the Ambassador, General Stillwell, MACV J-3, informs Secretary Thuan that U.S. aid for the special forces units responsible for the Aug 21 raids is being suspended until they are transferred to the field and placed under JGS command.
22 Oct 1963	Department of State, INR Research Memo RFE90	The State Department publishes a controversial research memorandum which takes issue with the Pentagon's optimistic reading of the statistical indicators on the progress of the war. The memo states that certain definitely negative and ominous trends can be identified.
	Harkins sees Don	General Harkins sees General Don, and in a conversation whose interpretation is subsequently disputed, tells him that U.S. officers should not be approached about a coup as it distracts them from their job, fighting the VC. Don takes it as U.S. discouragement of a coup.
23 Oct 1963	CAS agent meets Don	General Don renews contact with Conein to ask for clarification of U.S. policy after Harkins' statement to him of the previous day. Conein repeats Washington guidance, which relieves Don. Conein asks for proof of the existence of the coup and its plan; Don promises to provide political organization plan as proof the following day.

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24 Oct 1963	Diem invites Lodge to Dalat	Diem extends an invitation to Lodge and his wife to spend Sunday, Oct 27, with him at his villa in Dalat. Lodge is pleased, Diem has come to him.
	1st CAS agent meeting with Don	Conein meets with Don in the morning and the latter reports that Harkins had corrected his previous remarks and apologized for any misunderstanding. The coup is set to take place before Nov 2 and he will meet Conein later that day to re-view the plans.
	2nd CAS agent meeting with Don	In the evening, Don tells Conein that the coup committee voted not to reveal any plans because of concern about security leaks. He promises to turn over to Conein for Lodge's Eyes Only the operation plan two days before the coup occurs.
	UN fact-finding team arrives in Saigon	The UN fact-finding team arrives in Saigon and begins its investigation.
25 Oct 1963	CAS Saigon message 1964	Lodge argues that the time has come to go ahead with a coup and we should not thwart the maturing plot. He takes strong exception to Harkins reservations about the determination and ability of the plotters to carry off the coup.
	CAP message 63590	Bundy, replying for the White House, is concerned about the dangers of U.S. support for a coup that fails. We must be in a position to judge the prospects for the coup plan and discourage any effort with likelihood of failure.

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26 Oct 1963	Vietnamese National Day	Diem reviews the troops in the National Day parade before scant crowds with Lodge and all other diplomatic personnel in attendance. The coup had originally been scheduled for this day.
27 Oct 1963	Lodge-Diem meeting	As planned, Lodge travels to Dalat with Diem and engages in a day-long conversation that produces little results. Diem makes his standard complaints against the U.S., and whenever Lodge asks what he is planning to do about specific U.S. requests, he changes the subject. At one point, he does inquire, however, about resumption of the commercial import program. Lodge asks what movement he will make on our requests. Diem changes the subject. Lodge's feelings of frustration confirm his conviction that we cannot work with Diem.
	Buddhist suicide	A seventh Buddhist monk commits suicide by fire.
28 Oct 1963	Don contacts Lodge	At the airport in the morning prior to departing for the dedication of an atomic energy facility in Dalat, General Don approaches Lodge and asks if Conein is authorized to speak for the U.S. Lodge says yes. Don then affirms the need for the coup to be completely Vietnamese. Lodge agrees, but when he asks about timing, Don replies that the generals are not yet ready.
	CAS agent meets Don	That evening Conein meets Don again and the latter says that the plans may be available for Lodge only four hours before

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		the coup. Lodge should not change his plans to go to Washington on Oct 31 as this would tip off the palace. Some details of the organization of the coup committee are discussed.
29 Oct 1963	CINCPAC alerts task force	CINCPAC alerts a naval and air task force to stand off Vietnam for possible evacuation of American dependents and civilians if required.
	NSC meeting	A decision is made at the NSC meeting to have Lodge fully inform Harkins on the coup plotting and arrangements, since if Lodge leaves, Harkins will be in charge. Concern is also registered at the differing views of the two men toward a coup.
	Special forces transferred from Saigon	In the first preparatory act of the coup, General Dinh orders Colonel Tung's special forces out of Saigon for maneuvers. It is unclear whether the action came as a part of the generals' coup or Nhu's pseudo coup.
30 Oct 1963	MACV messages 2028, 2033, and 2034	Belatedly apprised of the continuing contacts with the generals and the U.S. role in the coup plotting, General Harkins dispatches three angry cables to Taylor in which he disagrees with Lodge's interpretation of the U.S. policy. He understands it to be no active covert encouragement. He opposes personally a coup and doesn't think the generals have the forces to pull one off.



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	CAS Washington message 79109	The White House is now genuinely concerned at the Saigon dispute and tells Lodge it believes we still have the power to call off the coup if we choose to.
	CAS Saigon message 2063	Lodge replies to Washington that he is powerless to stop the coup, the matter is entirely in Vietnamese hands. Harkins does not concur.
	CAS Washington message 79407	To clear the air and redefine U.S. policy, Washington sent another cable to Lodge. The U.S. cannot accept as a policy position that it has no power to prevent the coup. If the coup does not have high prospects of success, Lodge should intercede with the generals to have it delayed or called off. More detailed information on the plans is urgently requested. Specific instructions to guide U.S. action during a coup are issued. They prescribe strict non-involvement and somewhat less strict neutrality.
31 Oct 1963	Lodge defers departure	Lodge, who had been scheduled to leave for Washington for high-level conferences, defers his departure because of the tense atmosphere and the apparent imminence of the coup.
<u>1 Nov 1963</u>		
10:00 a.m.	Lodge and Felt meet with Diem	Admiral Felt, who is visiting, and Lodge call on Diem, who reiterates many of the points he made to McNamara a month earlier. At the end of the meeting, Diem takes Lodge aside and indicates he is ready to talk about what the U.S. wants

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		him to do. Felt leaves Saigon after the meeting.
Late morning	Coup units begin to deploy	The first coup units begin to deploy in and around Saigon.
12:00 a.m.	Officers meet at JGS	The coup committee has convened a meeting of all senior Vietnamese officers except Generals Dinh and Cao at JGS. There they are informed of the coup and asked to support it. All except Colonel Tung do. Their pledges of support are taped. Tung is taken into custody later to be executed. The CNO was killed en route by an escort. A CAS officer is invited to the JGS and maintains telephone contact with the Embassy throughout the coup.
1:45 p.m.	U.S. notified	General Don calls General Stillwell, J-3 to General Harkins, and informs him that the coup is under way.
2:00 p.m.	Key installations taken	About this time coup forces are seizing the key installations in Saigon, including the post office, police headquarters, radio stations, airport, naval headquarters, etc. They were also deploying for attacks on the palace and the palace guard barracks and to block any counter-attack from outside the city.
4:00 p.m.	First skirmishes, Diem told to surrender	By about this time the first skirmish was taking place at the palace and guard barracks. Failing to reach General Dinh, Diem and Nhu realize the coup is serious. The generals called shortly after this and told the two brothers to surrender. They refused.

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4:30 p.m.	Coup broadcast, Diem calls Lodge	The generals go on radio, announce the coup and demand the resignation of Diem and Nhu. At the same time, Diem is calling Lodge. He asks Lodge where the U.S. stands. Lodge replies that the U.S. cannot yet have a view. He expresses concern for Diem's safety, and the conversation ends there.
5:00 p.m.	Generals again call Diem to demand surrender	Repeated calls are now made to the palace to get Diem to surrender. All the generals try. Colonel Tung is put on the phone and tells Diem he is a captive. Tung is then taken outside and executed. Diem and Nhu now frantically call all unit commanders but can find none loyal. Outside sporadic firing continues.
8:00 p.m.	Diem and Nhu flee	Sometime in the early evening, probably about eight o'clock, the two brothers escape from the palace through one of the secret underground passages constructed for just such emergencies. They are met by a Chinese friend who takes them to a previously prepared hideaway in Cholon. There they spend the night in telephone contact with the palace.
9:00 p.m.	Palace bombarded	At about nine o'clock, the attackers launch an artillery and armored barrage on the palace and its defenders which lasts through the night.
<u>2 Nov 1963</u>		
3:30 a.m.	Assault on the palace begins	The tank and infantry assault on the Gia Long palace begins.
6:20 a.m.	Diem calls generals to surrender	Diem calls General Don from the Cholon hideout to surrender, but does not tell his location.

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6:30 a.m.	Palace falls	Realizing the hopelessness of the situation, Diem issues a cease fire order to the palace guard and the palace falls to the insurgents. Colonel Thao, the commander of the attacking forces, learns of Diem's whereabouts and with JGS permission goes to arrest him.
6:45 a.m.	Diem and Nhu again escape	Arriving at the Cholon house, Thao calls JGS and is overheard by the brothers who escape to a nearby Catholic church.
6:50 a.m.	Diem and Nhu are captured	Diem again calls General Don and surrenders, this time unconditionally. He and Nhu are taken prisoner shortly thereafter and are murdered in the back of an armored personnel carrier en route to JGS.
afternoon	Vice President Tho confers on new government	Vice President Tho enters into intensive conferences and negotiations with the coup committee on the composition of a new interim government which he will head.
3 Nov 1963	Lodge meets with Generals Don and Kim	Generals Don and Kim call on Lodge at the Embassy and apologize for the absence of Minh who is closeted with Tho working on the composition of the new government. A two-tiered government is expected. A military committee chaired by General Minh will supervise a largely civilian cabinet under Tho's Prime Ministership. Lodge promises the immediate restoration of aid programs and assures the generals of forthcoming U.S. recognition.
4 Nov 1963	Lodge meets with General Minh	On instructions from Washington, Lodge meets with Minh and Don and urges them to make a clarifying statement on the deaths

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		of Diem and Nhu to allay anxieties about the new leaders. Minh promises to do so and to announce the new government soon.
5 Nov 1963	New government announced	The new government is announced with Minh as President and Chief of the Military Committee. Tho is Premier, Minister of Economy and Minister of Finance. Don is Minister of Defense and Dinh is Minister of Security. Most other posts are filled by civilians, but there is a noticeable absence of well-known opponents to Diem. A later announcement suspends the 1956 constitution, and outlines the structure and functions of the new interim government.
6 Nov 1963	Composition of the Military Revolutionary Council announced	Saigon Radio announces the composition of the new Military Revolutionary Council with Minh as Chairman and including all important generals except Khanh.
7 Nov 1963	NLF makes post-coup policy statement	In a post-coup policy statement, the NLF lists eight demands of the new regime, all but one of which the Minh-Tho Government was going to do anyway.
	Brent meets with Tho on U.S. aid	USOM Director Brent meets with Tho who indicated that all economic aid questions would be handled directly by his office. It was further agreed that a high-level Vietnamese commission would work with a similar group in the U.S. mission to establish economic and aid policies and levels.

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8 Nov 1963	U.S. recognizes new government	Lodge calls on the new Foreign Minister, Pham Dang Lam, and presents a note of U.S. recognition. The new government will be heavily dependent on the U.S. in all areas.
9 Nov 1963	Embassy Saigon message 986	In the weekly progress report, the mission notes the greatly increased VC activity in the week following the coup. The return of coup units to the field will reverse this trend, it is hoped.
12 Nov 1963	CINCPAC message to JCS 120604Z 63	CINCPAC takes note that the statistical indicators for the war (VC attacks, weapons loss ratio, VC defections) show deterioration dating back to the summer.
17 Nov 1963	NLF releases stronger set of demands	Its first set of demands having been effectively preempted by the new Minh Government, the NLF release a new and stronger set of demands including that the U.S. influence be eliminated, the fighting be halted and that a coalition government be established. For the first time the NLF states that reunification of Vietnam is an objective.
20 Nov 1963	Honolulu Conference	The entire country team meets with Rusk, McNamara, Taylor, Bundy, and Bell to review the current situation. Lodge voices optimism about the new government, but notes the inexperience of the new leaders. We should not press them too hard. We should secondly pledge aid to them in at least the amounts we were giving it to Diem. Brent notes the economic naivety of the generals and indicates the need for greater U.S. technical assistance to

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		the government. Harkins' assessment is guardedly optimistic, taking note of the higher than average VC activity in the week after the coup. The determination of the new leaders impressed him, but he was concerned about the disruptions that wholesale replacements of province and district chiefs might have.
	Press release after Honolulu Conference	The press release gives few details but does reiterate the U.S. intention to withdraw 1,000 troops by the end of the year.
22 Nov 1963	Lodge confers with the President	Having flown to Washington the day after the conference, Lodge meets with the President and presumably continues the kind of report given in Honolulu.
23 Nov 1963	NSAM 273	Drawing together the results of the Honolulu Conference and Lodge's meeting with the President, NSAM 273 reaffirms the U.S. commitment to defeat the VC in South Vietnam. It reiterates the plan to withdraw 1,000 troops by year's end and to end the war in the first three corps areas by the end of 1964 and in the Delta by the end of 1965. U.S. support for the new regime is confirmed and aid in at least the amounts given to Diem is guaranteed. The Delta is to be the area of concentration for all military, political, economic and social efforts. And clandestine operations against the North and into Laos are authorized.

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THE OVERTHROW OF NGO DINH DIEM

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IV. B. 5.

THE OVERTHROW OF NGO DINH DIEM  
MAY-NOVEMBER 1963

I

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1963, the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem seemed to exhibit no more signs of advanced decay or imminent demise than might have been discerned since 1958 or 1959. Only in hindsight can certain developments be identified as salient. Of these, certainly the steadily increasing influence of the Nhus was the most ominous. Nhu came more and more to dominate Diem in the last year of the Diem rule. But as his power increased, Nhu's grip on reality seems to have slipped and he was reported in that last year to have been smoking opium and to have been mentally ill. 1/ Meanwhile, Mme. Nhu was developing a power obsession of her own. The catastrophic effect of their influence during the ensuing crisis, however, was impossible to have predicted. As one perceptive observer noted, the Ngo family "had come to power with a well-developed persecution complex and had subsequently developed a positive mania for survival." 2/

Another source of concern should have been the regime's self-imposed isolation from the populace. It had left the peasants apathetic, a cause for real concern in a struggle with the zealous, doctrinaire Viet Cong; but, more importantly, it had alienated large portions of the restive urban population who felt most directly the impact of the regime's arbitrary rule. The regime, in fact, had no real base of political support and relied on the loyalty of a handful of key military commanders to keep it in power by forestalling any overthrow. The loyalty of these men was bought with promotions and favors. Graft and corruption should also have drawn concern, even if governmental dishonesty was endemic in Asia, and probably not disproportionate at that time in South Vietnam.

It was not, however, the strains that these problems had placed on the Vietnamese political structure that were ultimately decisive. The fundamental weakness of the Diem regime was the curious rigidity and political insensitivity of its mandarin style in the face of a dramatic crisis of popular confidence.

With regard to the war, the consensus of the U.S. military mission and the U.S. intelligence community in the spring of 1963 was that the military situation in South Vietnam was steadily improving and the war was beginning to be won. A National Intelligence Estimate in April 1963 concluded that the infusion of U.S. advisors had begun to have the desired effect of strengthening the ARVN and increasing its aggressiveness. 3/ The Viet Cong retained good strength, but could be contained

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by the ARVN if they did not receive a great increase in external support. Statistical indices showed a decline in Viet Cong attacks from the previous year, increased ARVN offensive activity, and improvement in the weapons loss ratio. Continuing problems were Diem's loyalty-based officer promotion policy, ARVN desertions and AWOL's, poor intelligence, and low grade NCO's and company grade officers. Nonetheless, the overall outlook was sanguine. Particular reason for encouragement was the adoption in February 1963 of the National Campaign Plan urged by the U.S. The hopeful prospects were summarized for Secretary McNamara in a briefing paper for the Honolulu Conference of May 6:

The over-all situation in Vietnam is improving. In the military sector of the counterinsurgency, we are winning. Evidences of improvement are clearly visible, as the combined impact of the programs which involve a long lead time begin to have effect on the Viet Cong. 4/

Even as seasoned an observer of insurgency as Sir Robert Thompson, Chief of the British Advisory Mission, was able to report that, "Now, in March 1963, I can say, and in this I am supported by all members of the mission, that the Government is beginning to win the shooting war against the Viet Cong." 5/

One reason for the optimism of these appraisals was the vigor with which the government, under the direction of Nhu, was pushing the Strategic Hamlet Program. Nhu had been initially cool to the idea, but once he established the U.S. willingness to fund the program, he focused on it as the principal vehicle of the counterinsurgency campaign and as an excellent means of extending the oligarchy's control into the countryside. In April the GVN claimed it had completed 5,000 strategic hamlets and had another 2,000 under construction. 6/ There was already official U.S. misgiving, however, about the quality of many of the hamlets and about overextension of the country's limited human resources in the program's frantic rate of expansion. Nevertheless, field reports seemed to support the success of the program which was seen as the key to the struggle against the Viet Cong.

U.S.-GVN relations in the spring of 1963 were beginning to show signs of accumulating stress. As the U.S. commitment and involvement deepened, frictions between American advisors and Vietnamese counterparts at all levels increased. Diem, under the influence of Nhu, complained about the quantity and zeal of U.S. advisors. 7/ They were creating a colonial impression among the people, he said. Diem chose to dramatize his complaint by delaying agreement on the commitment of South Vietnamese funds for joint counterinsurgency projects. 8/ The issue was eventually resolved, but the sensitivity to the growing U.S. presence remained and as the long crisis summer wore on, it gradually became a deep-seated suspicion of U.S. motives.

The report of the Mansfield mission, published in March, further exacerbated relations between the two countries. Diem and Nhu were

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particularly incensed by its praise of Cambodian neutralism and criticism of their regime. Coup rumors began to circulate again that spring, and the prevailing palace state of mind hearkened back to suspicions of U.S. complicity in the abortive 1960 coup. 9/ Mme. Nhu's ascerbic public criticism of the United States was a further source of friction. By May 1963, these problems in U.S.-GVN relations were already substantial enough to preoccupy officials of both governments. Within a matter of weeks, however, events thrust them into the background of a far more serious crisis.

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II

THE BUDDHIST CRISIS: MAY 8 - AUGUST 21

1. The Crisis Erupts

The incident in Hue on May 8, 1963, that precipitated what came to be called the Buddhist crisis, and that started the chain of events that ultimately led to the overthrow of the Diem regime and the murder of the Ngo brothers, happened both inadvertently and unexpectedly. No one then foresaw that it would generate a national opposition movement capable of rallying virtually all non-communist dissidence in South Vietnam. More importantly, no one then appreciated the degree of alienation of Vietnam's people from their government, nor the extent of the political decay within the regime, a regime no longer capable of coping with popular discontent.

The religious origins of the incident are traceable to the massive flight of Catholic refugees from North Vietnam after the French defeat in 1954. An estimated one million Catholics fled the North and resettled in the South. 1/ Diem, animated, no doubt, by religious as well as humanitarian sympathy, and with an eye to recruiting political support from his coreligionists, accorded these Catholic refugees preferential treatment in land redistribution, relief and assistance, commercial and export-import licenses, government employment, and other GVN largess. Because Diem could rely on their loyalty, they came to fill almost all important civilian and military positions. As an institution, the Catholic Church enjoyed a special legal status. The Catholic primate, Ngo Dinh Thuc, was Diem's brother and advisor. But prior to 1962, there had been no outright discrimination against Buddhists. However, among South Vietnam's 3-4 million practicing Buddhists and the 80% of the population who were nominal Buddhists, the regime's favoritism, authoritarianism, and discrimination created a smoldering resentment.

In April 1963, the government ordered provincial officials to enforce a longstanding but generally ignored ban on the public display of religious flags. The order came just after the officially encouraged celebrations in Hue commemorating the 25th anniversary of the ordination of Ngo Dinh Thuc, the Archbishop of Hue, during which Papal flags had been prominently flown. The order also came, as it happened, just prior to Buddha's birthday (May 8) -- a major Buddhist festival. Hue, an old provincial capital of Vietnam, was the only real center of Buddhist learning and scholarship in Vietnam and its university had long been a center of left-wing dissidence. Not surprisingly, then, the Buddhists in Hue defiantly flew their flags in spite of the order and, when the local administration appeared to have backed down on the ban, were emboldened to hold a previously scheduled mass meeting on May 8 to commemorate Buddha's birthday. Seeing the demonstration as a challenge to family prestige (Hue was also the capital of the political fief of another Diem

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brother, Ngo Dinh Can) and to government authority, local officials tried to disperse the crowds. When preliminary efforts produced no results, the Catholic deputy province chief ordered his troops to fire. In the ensuing melee, nine persons were killed, including some children, and fourteen were injured. Armored vehicles allegedly crushed some of the victims. The Diem government subsequently put out a story that a Viet Cong agent had thrown a grenade into the crowd and that the victims had been crushed in a stampede. It steadfastly refused to admit responsibility even when neutral observers produced films showing government troops firing on the crowd.

Diem's mandarin character would not permit him to handle this crisis with the kind of flexibility and finesse it required. He was incapable of publicly acknowledging responsibility for the tragedy and seeking to conciliate the angry Buddhists. He was convinced that such a public loss of face would undermine his authority to rule, oblivious to the fact that no modern ruler can long ignore massive popular disaffection whatever his own particular personal virtues may be. So the government clung tenaciously to its version of what had occurred.

The following day in Hue over 10,000 people demonstrated in protest of the killings. It was the first of the long series of protest activities with which the Buddhists were to pressure the regime in the next four months. The Buddhists rapidly organized themselves, and on May 10, a manifesto of the Buddhist clergy was transmitted to the government demanding freedom to fly their flag, legal equality with the Catholic Church, an end of arrests and freedom to practice their beliefs, and indemnification of the victims of the May 8th incident with punishment for its perpetrators. 2/ These five demands were officially presented to President Diem on May 15, and the Buddhists held their first press conference after the meeting. Publicized hunger strikes and meetings continued throughout May, but Diem continued to drag his feet on placating the dissenters or settling issues. On May 30, about 350 Buddhist monks demonstrated in front of the National Assembly in Saigon, and a 48-hour hunger strike was announced. On June 3, a demonstration in Hue was broken up with tear gas and several people were burned, prompting charges that the troops had used mustard gas. On June 4, the government announced the appointment of an interministerial committee headed by Vice President Tho to resolve the religious issue, but by this time such gestures were probably too late. Large portions of the urban population had rallied to the Buddhist protest, recognizing in it the beginnings of genuine political opposition to Diem. On June 8, Mme. Nhu exacerbated the problem by announcing that the Buddhists were infiltrated by communists.

Throughout the early days of the crisis, the U.S. press had closely covered the events and brought them to the attention of the world. On June 11, the press was tipped off to be at a downtown intersection at noon. Expecting another protest demonstration, they were horrified to witness the first burning suicide by a Buddhist monk. Thich Quang Duc's fiery death shocked the world and electrified South Vietnam.

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Negotiations had been taking place between Vice President Tho's committee and the Buddhists since June 5, with considerable acrimonious public questioning of good faith by both sides. After the suicide, the U.S. intensified its already considerable pressure on the government to mollify the Buddhists, and to bring the deteriorating political situation under control. Finally, on June 16, a joint GVN-Buddhist communique was released outlining the elements of a settlement, but affixing no responsibility for the May 8 incident. Violent suppression by the GVN of rioting the next day, however, abrogated the spirit of the agreement. The Nhus, for their part, immediately undertook to sabotage the agreement by secretly calling on the GVN-sponsored youth organizations to denounce it. By late June, it was apparent that the agreement was not meant as a genuine gesture of conciliation by Diem, but was only an effort to appease the U.S. and paper over a steadily widening fissure in internal politics.

The evident lack of faith on the part of the government in the June 16 agreement discredited the conciliatory policy of moderation that the older Buddhist leadership had followed until that time. In late June, leadership of the Buddhist movement passed to a younger, more radical set of monks, with more far-reaching political objectives. They made intelligent and skillful political use of a rising tide of popular support. Carefully planned mass meetings and demonstrations were accompanied with an aggressive press campaign of opposition to the regime. Seizing on the importance of American news media, they cultivated U.S. newsmen, tipped them off to demonstrations and rallies, and carefully timed their activities to get maximum press coverage. Not surprisingly, the Ngo family reacted with ever more severe suppression to the Buddhist activists, and with acrimonious criticism and even threats to the American newsmen.

Early in July, Vice President Tho's committee announced that a preliminary investigation of the May 8 incident had confirmed that the deaths were the result of an act of Viet Cong terrorism. Outraged, the Buddhists denounced the findings and intensified their protest activities. On July 19, under U.S. pressure, Diem made a brief two-minute radio address, ostensibly an expression of conciliation to the Buddhists, but so written and coldly delivered as to destroy in advance any effect its announced minor concessions might have had.

Within the regime, Nhu and his wife were severely criticizing Diem for caving in under Buddhist pressure. Mme. Nhu publicly ridiculed the Buddhist suicide as a "barbecue," accused the Buddhist leaders of being infiltrated with communists, and construed the protest movement as Viet Cong inspired. Both Nhu and his wife worked publicly and privately to undermine Diem's feeble efforts at compromise with the Buddhists, and rumors that Nhu was considering a coup against his brother began to circulate in July.

A U.S. Special National Intelligence Estimate on July 10 concluded with the perceptive prediction that if the Diem regime did nothing to implement the June 16 agreement and to appease the Buddhists, the

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likelihood of a summer of demonstrations was great, with the strong possibility of a non-communist coup attempt. 3/ By mid-August a week before Nhu launched general raids on Buddhist pagodas in Saigon and elsewhere, the CIA had begun to note malaise in the bureaucracy and the army:

Since the Buddhist dispute with the Diem government erupted on 8 May, there have been a series of reports indicating not only intensified plotting and grumbling among Diem's traditional non-Communist critics, but renewed restiveness and growing disaffection in official civilian and military circles over Diem's handling of the dispute. 4/

This estimate went on to detail numerous rumors of coup plots in existence since at least late June. But Nhu, in a bold move designed to frighten coup plotters, and to throw them off guard, had called in the senior generals on July 11, reprimanded them for not having taken action to squelch revolt, and questioned their loyalty to the regime. Nhu's move seemed to have temporarily set back all plans for an overthrow. CIA also reported rumors that Nhu himself was planning a "false coup" to draw out and then crush the Buddhists. 5/

In August, Buddhist militancy reached new intensity; monks burned themselves to death on the 5th, 15th, and 18th. The taut political atmosphere in Saigon in mid-August should have suggested to U.S. observers that a showdown was on the way. When the showdown came, however, in the August 21 raids on the pagodas, the U.S. mission was apparently caught almost completely off guard.

## 2. The U.S. "No Alternatives to Diem" Policy

The explanation of how the U.S. mission became detached from the realities of the political situation in Saigon in August 1963, is among the most ironic and tragic of our entire involvement in Vietnam. In dealing with Diem over the years, the U.S. had tried two radically different but ultimately equally unsuccessful approaches. Under Ambassador Elbridge Durbrow from the late '50s until 1961, we had used tough pressure tactics to bring Diem to implement programs and ideas we felt necessary to win the war against the Viet Cong. But Diem soon learned that the U.S. was committed to him as the only Vietnamese leader capable of rallying his country to defeat the communists. Armed with this knowledge he could defer action or ignore the Ambassador with relative impunity. He became adept at playing the role of offended lover. Thus by 1961, Durbrow was cut off from the palace, with little information about what was going on and even less influence over events. Under Frederick Nolting as U.S. Ambassador, the U.S. pursued a very different tactic. Forewarned not to allow himself to be isolated, Nolting set out through the patient cultivation of Diem's friendship and trust to secure a role for himself as Diem's close and confidential advisor. But there had been no basic change in the American belief that



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there was no alternative to Diem, and Diem must have quickly sensed this, for he continued to respond primarily to family interest, at best only listening impatiently to Nolting's carefully put complaints, secure in the knowledge that ultimately the U.S. would not abandon him no matter what he did. Both tactics failed because of American commitment. No amount of pressure or suasion was likely to be effective in getting Diem to adopt ideas or policies which he did not find to his liking, since we had communicated our unwillingness to consider the ultimate sanction -- withdrawal of support for his regime. We had ensnared ourselves in a powerless, no alternatives policy.

The denouement of this policy, the ultimate failure of all our efforts to coerce, cajole and coax Diem to be something other than the mandarin that he was, came in the midnight attack on the pagodas on August 21. And it created a fundamental dilemma for U.S. policy with respect to Diem. On the one hand, withdrawal of support for his regime was the only lever likely to force Diem to redress the Buddhist grievances and to make the political reforms prerequisite for popular support in the common fight against the Viet Cong. On the other hand, withdrawal of U.S. support for Diem would be signal U.S. approval for an anti-Diem coup, with all its potential for political instability and erosion of the war effort. We found ourselves in this predicament not entirely unexpectedly.

In May 1963, though it had failed to anticipate the Buddhist upheaval, the U.S. mission nevertheless quickly recognized the gravity of the threat to Diem and reported it to Washington. 6/ Nolting met with Diem on May 18 and outlined the steps he felt were necessary to retrieve the situation. These included a government acknowledgement of responsibility for the Hue incident, an offer to compensate the families of the victims, and a reaffirmation of religious equality and non-discrimination. As an alternative, he suggested an investigatory commission. Diem's noncommittal response led the Ambassador to think that Diem really believed the Viet Cong had caused the deaths and that the Buddhists had provoked the incident. Diem felt the U.S. was over-reacting to the events. 7/ Thus, at a critical time Nolting, in spite of his two years of careful groundwork, was unable to exercise any real influence over Diem. Nolting left on a well-deserved holiday and home leave shortly after this frustrating meeting.

By the end of May, Washington had become concerned at Diem's failure to act, and at the widening Buddhist protest. The Chargé d'Affaires, William Truehart, was instructed to press the GVN for action. 8/ Working with Secretary of State for Defense Thuan, Truehart tried to move the government toward negotiations with the Buddhists. After the demonstrations in Hue on June 3, the State Department instructed Truehart to tell Diem or Thuan that the U.S. also had a stake in an amicable settlement with the Buddhists. 9/ On the following day, Truehart met with Thuan and told him that U.S. support of South Vietnam could not be maintained if there was bloody repressive action in Hue. 10/ This seemed to get action. Later that day, Truehart was informed that

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Nolting's second suggestion had been adopted and a high-level commission had been named to settle the problem. The commission, headed by Vice President Tho, met belatedly with the Buddhists on June 5.

On June 8, Truehart had an interview with Diem to protest Mme. Nhu's public criticism of the Buddhists, which was poisoning the atmosphere for a settlement. When Diem refused to disavow her statements, Truehart threatened a U.S. "dissociation" from any future repressive measures to suppress demonstrations. Truehart left the meeting with the impression that Diem was more preoccupied with security measures than with negotiations. 11/ Nolting's low-key policy had by now been abandoned, both in Washington and in Saigon, in favor of a new tough line.

The situation was dramatically altered by the first Buddhist suicide on June 11. Alarmed, the State Department authorized Truehart to tell Diem that unless drastic action was taken to meet the Buddhist demands promptly, the U.S. would be forced to state publicly its dissociation from the GVN on the Buddhist issue. 12/ Truehart made his demarche on June 12. Diem replied that any such U.S. announcement would have a disastrous effect on the GVN-Buddhist negotiations. 13/ The negotiations finally got under way in earnest June 14 and the joint communique was issued June 16.

Truehart made repeated calls on Diem in late June and early July, urging him in the strongest language to take some action indicating the government's intention to abide in good faith by the June 16 agreement. His efforts were unavailing. Diem was either noncommittal, or talked in generalities about the difficulties of the problem.

On June 27, President Kennedy named Henry Cabot Lodge to replace Ambassador Nolting effective in September. After a brief stop in Washington, Nolting was hurried back to Saigon on July 11 to make one last effort to get Diem to conciliate the Buddhists. Nolting, evidently resenting the pressure tactics used by Truehart, met immediately with Diem and tried to mollify him. 14/ He succeeded only in convincing Diem to make the shallow gesture of the July 19 radio speech. Otherwise, Diem merely persisted in appeals for public harmony and support of the government, without any real attempt to deal with the Buddhist grievances.

Nolting spent his last month in Vietnam trying to repair U.S.-GVN relations and to move Diem to resolve the Buddhist crisis, but his attempts were continually undercut by the Nhus both publicly and privately. They had grown increasingly belligerent about the Buddhists during the summer, and by August spoke often of "crushing" them. Washington asked Nolting to protest such inflammatory remarks, and began to suspect Diem's capacity to conciliate the Buddhists in the face of Nhu sabotage. Nolting was instructed to suggest to Diem that Mme. Nhu be removed from the scene. 15/ Nolting asked Diem for a public declaration repudiating her remarks but after initially agreeing, Diem then demurred and postponed it. 16/ Finally, as a parting gesture to Nolting, he agreed on August 14 to make a statement. 17/ It came in the form of

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an interview with Marguerite Higgins of the New York Herald Tribune. Diem asserted that conciliation had been his policy all along and that it was "irreversible." He further said, in direct contradiction of a previous remark by Mme. Nhu, that the family was pleased with Lodge's appointment. 18/ Washington was apparently satisfied by this statement, which Diem viewed merely as a going-away present for Nolting. 19/ Less than a week later, Nolting's two years of careful work and an American policy would be in a shambles, betrayed by Nhu's midnight raid on the pagodas.

Underlying the prevailing U.S. view that there was no alternative to Diem was the belief that the disruptive effect of a coup on the war effort, and the disorganization that would follow such a coup, could only benefit the VC, perhaps decisively. 20/ Military estimates and reports emanating from MACV through the summer of 1963 continued to reflect an optimistic outlook, indicating good reason to continue our support of Diem even in the face of his inept handling of the Buddhist crisis. 21/ In retrospect, it can be seen that by July the GVN position in the war had begun to seriously deteriorate. At the time, however, this weakening was not yet apparent. The then prevailing view also held that the Buddhist crisis had not yet detracted from the war effort, although its potential to do so was recognized. Secretary McNamara on July 19 told a press conference that the war was progressing well and that the Buddhist crisis had thus far not affected it. 22/ The intelligence community, however, had already begun to note depressing effects of the crisis on military and civilian morale. 23/

Meanwhile, the U.S. press corps was reporting a far different view of both the war and the Buddhist crisis, one which was, in retrospect, nearer the reality. In particular, they were reporting serious failures in the Delta in both military operations and the Strategic Hamlet Program. 24/ Typical of this reporting was an August 15 story in the New York Times by David Halberstam presenting a very negative appraisal of the war in the Delta. 25/ Such reports were vehemently refuted within the Administration, most notably by General Krulak, the JCS Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency. 26/ At the lower echelons in the field, however, there were many U.S. advisors who did not share Krulak's sanguine view of the war's progress.

Within the Administration, no real low-risk alternative to Diem had ever been identified, and we had continued our support for his troublesome regime because Diem was regarded as the only Vietnamese figure capable of rallying national support in the struggle against the Viet Cong. The Buddhist crisis shattered our illusions about him, and increased the domestic U.S. political price to Kennedy of supporting Diem. But the only other option for us seemed a coup, with highly uncertain prospects for post-coup political stability. At a briefing for the President on July 4, the possibilities and prospects for a coup were discussed. 27/ It was the consensus that the Nhus could not be removed, but that there would surely be coup attempts in the next four months. Nolting's reported view, with which then Assistant Secretary of State, Roger Hilsman,

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did not entirely agree, was that a coup would most likely produce a civil war. Hilsman felt that the likelihood of general chaos in the wake of a coup was less than it had been the preceding year. (Notes on this briefing, reproduced in the Appendix, provide the first documentary evidence of highest level consideration of the ramifications of a coup.)

In a meeting at State the following day, July 5, Ambassador Nolting, who had cut short his vacation to return to Washington in the wake of the Buddhist crisis, told Under Secretary of State George Ball:

In his view if a revolution occurred in Viet-Nam which grew out of the Buddhist situation, the country would be split between feuding factions and the Americans would have to withdraw and the country might be lost to the Communists. This led to the question of how much pressure we could exert on Diem. Mr. Nolting replied that if we repudiated him on this issue his government would fall. The Ambassador believed that Diem would live up to the agreement (June 16) unless he believed that he was dealing with a political attempt to cause his overthrow. 28/

Earlier in the same interview he had said:

. . . that although interference by the Nhus was serious, he believed that the GVN would be able to come through this one slowly. As to tactics, the more Diem was prodded the slower he went. While Nhu was troublesome he was chiefly responsible for gains which had been made in the provincial pacification program. 29/

Nolting, no doubt, expressed similar views when he met with Secretary McNamara before returning to Saigon.

In spite of the mounting political pressure on the President in Congress and in the press because of the Buddhist repressions, the Administration decided to send Nolting back for another try at getting Diem to settle the dispute with the Buddhists. Anxiety in Washington mounted as the summer wore on, and Nolting's efforts with Diem produced evident progress. By the time of the August 21 raids, Washington's patience with Diem was all but exhausted.

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III

LODGE vs. DIEM: AUGUST 20 - OCTOBER 2

1. The Pagoda Raids and Repercussions

Shortly after midnight on August 21, six days after Nolting's frustrated departure, Nhu, shattering any remaining illusions about the GVN's conciliatory approach to the Buddhists, and betraying Diem's parting pledge to Nolting, staged a general assault on Buddhist pagodas. In Saigon, Hue, and other coastal cities, the regime's private shock troops -- the U.S.-trained Special Forces -- and the combat police invaded the pagodas and arrested hundreds of Buddhist monks, effectively destroying an American policy and marking the beginning of the end of the Diem regime.

On August 18, ten senior generals had met and decided that they would ask Diem for a declaration of martial law to permit them to return Buddhist monks from outside Saigon to their own provinces and pagodas, hopefully reducing tensions in the capital. 1/ Among those in attendance at the meeting were General Ton That Dinh, military governor of Saigon and commander of III Corps surrounding it, and General Huynh Van Cao, IV Corps commander, both of whom owed their positions to their loyalty to the regime. Either or both of them probably reported the outcome of this meeting to Diem and Nhu.

In any case, Nhu had decided to eliminate the Buddhist opposition, and to confront the U.S. with a fait accompli on Lodge's arrival; he assumed the U.S. would protestingly acquiesce, as it always had in the past. On the afternoon of the 20th, Nhu met with a small group of generals, including Don, Khiem, and Dinh who presented the martial law proposal to him. Nhu, his own plans for the raids now far advanced, told them to take their proposal to Diem. At a meeting later that evening, Diem acquiesced in the generals' plan and at midnight the decree was published under the signature of General Don, Chief of the Joint General Staff. 2/ Meanwhile, unbeknown to the generals, Nhu had already alerted Colonel Tung's Special Forces and the combat police. Once the facade of martial law was in place, so the army would be blamed for the raids, Nhu gave the word and the crackdown began. To further implicate the army, some of the combat police wore paratroop uniforms. Pagodas were ransacked in all the major South Vietnamese cities, and over 1400 Buddhists, primarily monks, were arrested. 3/ In the raid on Xa Loi pagoda in Saigon about thirty monks were wounded or injured, and several were subsequently listed as missing; exact casualties were never established. 4/ Diem had approved the martial law decree without consulting his cabinet, but it was never established whether he knew of and approved Nhu's plans for the pagoda raids. Significantly, he never subsequently sought to dissociate himself from Nhu or the raids.

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While the martial law decree gave General Don command of all troops, in fact, General Dinh and Colonel Tung took their orders directly from the palace. Thus, when the raids came, General Don was at JGS unaware. In a long discussion on August 23 with a CAS officer, he suggested that the martial law decree was only phase one of a larger Generals' plot. 5/ They were thrown off balance, however, by the raids and by General Dinh's rapid assumption of local control of martial law in Saigon.

In planning the raids, Nhu had been extremely careful not to have word leak to the U.S. mission (although the Buddhists and the U.S. press corps had been tipped off by their own informants). On the morning after the attack, Richardson, the CIA chief and the senior American civilian in Saigon, emphatically denied to Halberstam any foreknowledge of the plan. 6/ To further isolate the U.S. from an accurate assessment during the operation, Nhu had the telephone lines to the Embassy and the homes of all senior U.S. personnel cut shortly after the raids got under way. 7/ His efforts had the desired effect. It was several days before the U.S. mission in Saigon and officials in Washington could piece together what happened. In Washington, Harriman and Michael Forrestal, a member of McGeorge Bundy's staff at the White House, drafted a stiff public statement that was released by the State Department at 9:30 the following morning. It deplored the raids as "a direct violation by the Vietnamese Government of assurances that it was pursuing a policy of reconciliation with the Buddhists." 8/ But the first U.S. intelligence reports, based on information from Nhu, accepted army responsibility for the raids, and treated their coincidence with the martial law decree as, in effect, a military coup. In an August 21 memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, the Director of DIA, General Carroll, wrote, "Although the military moves are based on an alleged presidential proclamation, the military leaders have, in effect, assumed full control." 9/

When the raids occurred, Lodge, Nolting, and Roger Hilsman, the Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East, had been conferring in Honolulu. Lodge was immediately instructed to proceed to Saigon. 10/ After a brief stop in Tokyo, Lodge touched down in Saigon at 9:30 p.m. on August 22, in an atmosphere charged with tension and official U.S. confusion. Awaiting him was a cable from Hilsman asking for a clarification of the situation. Had the military taken over and retained Diem as a figurehead; had Diem strengthened his own position by calling in the military; or were the Nhus really calling the shots? 11/ Within twenty-four hours, Lodge had sent a preliminary reply: there had been no coup, but there seemed also to be no diminution in the roles of the Nhus, although the power roles within the regime were unclear. 12/

That same day, the first military feelers had been put out from the Vietnamese generals to determine what the U.S. reaction would be to a military coup. General Don, the commander of the armed forces under the martial law decree, had a long, rambling conversation with a CAS officer. He first outlined the true role the army had played in the events of August 20-21 and then inquired why the U.S. had blamed the army for the raids on the pagodas:

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General Don has heard personally that the military is being blamed by Vietnamese public for the attack on the pagodas. He said that the US Govt is at fault for this misconception because VOA announced that the military took action against the pagodas. Don queried why VOA did not admit that Colonel Tung's Special Forces and the Police carried out the action. Don believes this would help the military at this point. Don stated that the USA should now make its position known. 13/

In a conversation the same day with Rufus Phillips of USOM, General Kim, deputy to General Don, bitterly attacked Nhu, charging him with responsibility for the raids, and deploring his dominant role in the government. He said that unless the popular impression that the army was responsible for the raids were corrected, the army would be handicapped in its fight against the VC. He stated that a firm U.S. stand for the removal of the Nhus would unify the army and permit it to act against them. 14/ These two direct and obviously reinforcing requests for U.S. support for military action aimed at Nhu's ouster marked the formal beginning of the U.S. involvement in the protracted plotting against the Diem regime. Two senior civilians in the government, Diem's chef de cabinet, Vo Van Hai, and Secretary of State, Nguyen Dinh Thuan, were simultaneously telling U.S. contacts that Nhu's elimination from the government was vital and that the U.S. should take a strong stand against him. 15/

On August 24, Lodge cabled his appraisal of the situation to Washington, based on these conversations. "Nhu," he reported, "probably with full support of Diem, had a large hand in planning of action against Buddhists, if he did not fully master-mind it. His influence has also been significantly increased." 16/ Nhu had simply taken advantage of the concern of certain generals, possibly not fully informing the regular army of the planned action. Nonetheless, none of the important Saigon area troop commanders (Don, Dinh, and Tung) were presently disaffected with the regime. Furthermore, absence of clear-cut military leadership and troop strength in Saigon for a move against the Nhus would make U.S. support of such an action a "shot in the dark." 17/

For the State Department, the problem of clarifying the public record about the raids and affixing responsibility for them had become acute by August 24. The press reports emanating from Saigon had from the outset blamed Nhu for the raids, but VOA, with a large audience in Vietnam, continued to report the official U.S. position that the army was culpable. 18/ The accumulating evidence against Nhu and the likelihood of severe damage to army morale if VOA did not broadcast a clarification seemed to call for retractions.

The second issue for Washington was Nhu. The generals had asked, in effect, for a green light to move against him, but Lodge had cautioned against it. Hilsman reports that as he, Harriman, Forrestal, and Ball deliberated over the drafting of a reply on that Saturday morning, the statement of Thuan to Phillips that "under no circumstance should the

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United States acquiesce in what the Nhus had done," was given great weight. 19/ Admiral Felt telephoned Washington from CINCPAC to support a strong U.S. stand against the Nhus. 20/ The unanswered question, of course, was whether the Nhus could be removed without also sacrificing Diem, and if not, whether the resulting political instability would not have an even more detrimental effect on the war effort than maintaining Diem.

The August 24 cable of instructions to Lodge resulting from these deliberations outlined an important, and subsequently controversial, new policy approach for the U.S. in South Vietnam. Its opening paragraphs crisply set forth the new American view:

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

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

If, in spite of all your efforts, Diem remains obdurate and refuses, then we must face the possibility that Diem himself cannot be preserved. 21/

Lodge was instructed to tell the GVN the U.S. could not accept the actions against the Buddhists and that prompt dramatic steps to redress the situation must be taken. The key military leaders were to be privately informed that,

. . . US would find it impossible to continue support GVN militarily and economically unless above steps are taken immediately which we recognize requires removal of Nhus from the scene. We wish give Diem reasonable opportunity to remove Nhus, but if he remains obdurate, then we are prepared to accept the obvious implication that we can no longer support Diem. You may also tell appropriate military commanders we will give them direct support in any interim period of breakdown central government mechanism. 22/

Finally, the message recognized the need to publicly exonerate the army from the raids and asked Lodge to approve a VOA broadcast to that effect. Lodge was requested, as well, to survey urgently for alternative leadership.

Clearance of the draft message was complicated by the coincident week-end absence from Washington of most of the top level members of the Administration. The President was in Hyannis Port; Rusk was in New York; and McNamara and McCone were away on vacation. Both the



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President and the Secretary of State were reached, however, and approved the draft. Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric approved for Defense, and General Taylor for the JCS. Schlesinger, in his account of the incident, suggests that the cable was hasty and ill-considered, and that the President immediately began to back away from it. 23/

Lodge replied the following day endorsing the strong position but proposing to forego a futile approach to Diem and to state our position instead only to the generals, thus throwing all our weight behind a coup. The cable stated:

Believe that chances of Diem's meeting our demands are virtually nil. At the same time, by making them we give Nhu chance to forestall or block action by military. Risk, we believe, is not worth taking, with Nhu in control combat forces Saigon. Therefore, propose we go straight to Generals with our demands, without informing Diem. Would tell them we prepared have Diem without Nhus but it is in effect up to them whether to keep him. 24/

Hilsman asserts that the cable also reflected Lodge's view that since our disapproval of GVN action was well known, it was not fitting for the U.S. to go to Diem, it was Diem who should come to us. 25/

In a separate CAS cable the same day, Richardson, the CIA Chief of Station in Saigon, reported that at a meeting with Lodge and Harkins it had been agreed that Diem would not remove Nhu and that therefore, assuming State's cable of instructions on 24 August (Appendix) represented Washington's basic policy, the consensus was that contact should be immediately made with generals such as Minh and Khanh to assess the degree of unity and determination of senior officers. Minh was considered the best possible interim leader, with Vice President Tho as the most attractive candidate for President among the civilians. The cable concluded with the view that a junta would probably operate behind the scenes in the event of a successful coup, and that the U.S. should leave the specific tactics of a coup up to the generals. 26/ There is a hiatus in the available cable traffic at this point, but Hilsman indicates that Washington decided on Sunday, August 25, to defer a direct approach to Diem until more was known about the situation. 27/

In Lodge's reply, he had also apparently approved the proposed VOA broadcast to exonerate the army. Hilsman briefed the press on the basis of a previously approved draft statement on August 25. The statement expressed strong U.S. disapproval of the raids, which were attributed to Nhu. In reporting the story, the press speculated that such a strong statement probably indicated that measures such as aid suspension were being considered. VOA had been instructed to broadcast only the substances of the U.S. statement as provided in the press guidance and nothing more. The instructions somehow got mislaid, and on Monday morning, August 26, just several hours before Lodge was to present his credentials to Diem, VOA broadcast in full a UPI story which flatly

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asserted that "the US may sharply reduce its aid to Vietnam unless President Diem gets rid of secret police officials responsible for the attacks." 28/ Lodge was understandably upset, and sent a testy cable rhetorically inquiring whether he really was in charge of tactics as he had been given to understand. 29/ Rusk sent a personal cable of apology to Lodge, and VOA promptly broadcast a denial of U.S. intent to cut aid, but the initial damage had been done.

The Vietnamese reaction to the attack on the pagodas during this time had been dramatic. In the United States, Mme. Nhu's father and mother, respectively the Vietnamese Ambassador to the U.S. and the Vietnamese observer at the UN, had both resigned, making bitter public statements denouncing the raids. In South Vietnam, the Foreign Minister, Vo Van Mau, had resigned and shaved his head like a Buddhist monk in protest. On August 23, students at the faculties of medicine and pharmacy at the University of Saigon turned out to stage mass demonstrations on behalf of the Buddhists. The GVN reacted in the only way it seemed to know, with massive arrests. But the demonstrations continued, and when the university was closed, the protest was taken up by high school and junior high school students. These were dramatic evidences indeed of the degree of disaffection with the regime, since most of these students were from the middle class families that formed the bureaucracy and the army leadership. Students in Vietnam had no substantial record of political activism as was the case with their counterparts in other parts of Asia, like Korea. Furthermore, some of the Buddhist leadership had survived the raids and gone underground and were soon passing out leaflets on the streets again. On the day of the raids, two monks had taken refuge in the USQM building next door to Xa Loi pagoda. The following day, three others, including the militant young leader Tich Tri Quang, took refuge in the U.S. Embassy, where they were warmly received by Lodge and remained until the successful November coup. 30/

2. Mis-Coup

Rumors of coup plotting had been a standard part of the Saigon scene under Diem from the very beginning. And there had been several attempts. In 1957, an assassin fired at Diem at an up-country fair. In November 1960, he had narrowly escaped being overthrown by a military coup by negotiating with the dissident officers until loyal reinforcements could be moved into Saigon to restore his control. And in 1962, two disgruntled Air Force pilots had unsuccessfully bombed and strafed the Gia Long Palace. So, when rumors of coup plotting began to gain currency again in the spring of 1963, they were monitored by the U.S. intelligence community, but not given extraordinary prominence or credence. By mid-summer, however, with the Buddhist crisis in full bloom, more serious consideration was given to the growing number of reports identifying plotters and schemes. 31/ One plot, identified in late June, was led by Dr. Tran Kim Tuyen, Diem's Director of Political and Social Studies (national intelligence). 32/ It involved elements of the Civic Action Ministry, the Information Ministry, the Secret Police, and some junior army officers. A separate plot involving other elements of the army was reported, and on July 8

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General Don indicated to a CAS officer that there was support among all but a couple of generals for a coup. 33/ Nhu's July 11 meeting with the generals, however, seemed to disorient their efforts temporarily. In an August 14 memorandum, the CIA acknowledged some military support for a coup, but doubted that anyone would risk it unless a deterioration of the political situation threatened a Viet Cong victory. 34/ The pagoda attack was just such a deterioration and it precipitated the generals' first approach to the U.S. on August 23 about a coup.

With State's instructions of 24 August as guidance, Lodge met with Harkins, Truehart, Mecklin, and Richardson on the morning of August 26 before presenting his credentials to Diem. They decided that the official U.S. hand should not show -- i.e., Harkins should not talk to the generals. It was agreed that Lt. Colonel Conein of the CIA would contact General Khiem, and Mr. Spera (also of CIA) would contact General Khanh, II Corps commander in Pleiku, conveying the following points to each:

- a. Solidification of further elaboration of action aspects of present thinking and planning. What should be done?
- b. We in agreement Nhus must go.
- c. Question of retaining Diem or not up to them.
- d. Bonzes and other arrestees must be released immediately and five-point agreement of 16 June be fully carried out.
- e. We will provide direct support during any interim period of breakdown of central government mechanism.
- f. We cannot be of any help during initial action of assuming power of the state. Entirely their own action, win or lose. Don't expect to be bailed out.
- g. If Nhus do not go and if Buddhists' situation is not redressed as indicated, we would find it impossible continue military and economic support.
- h. It is hoped bloodshed can be avoided or reduced to absolute minimum.
- i. It is hoped that during process and after, developments conducted in such manner as to retain and increase the necessary relations between Vietnamese and Americans which will allow for progress of country and successful prosecution of the war. 35/

Conein met with Khiem on August 27, and after conveying his message learned that Minh was the leader of the cabal, which included also Generals Kim, Khanh, Thieu, and Le. Don was aware of the plot and approved, but was too exposed to participate. General Minh was under surveillance, and had asked not to be contacted by the U.S. Khiem recognized the need to neutralize General Cao, the IV Corps commander, General Dinh, the III Corps and Saigon Area commander, and Colonel Tung. 36/ A separate CAS report indicated that General Kim had charge of plans for the provisional successor government which would include both civilians and military, with Minh as President. 37/

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Meanwhile, back in Washington, by the time the NSC met on Monday morning, August 26, misgivings about supporting a coup in the policy outlined in State's August 24 message -- had developed. Hilsman's account credits McNamara, Taylor, and McCone with second thoughts. 38/ Whatever the outcome of Monday's meeting, another was held the next day, after which Lodge was cabled for more details about the coup plans, and an assessment of their chances of success. 39/ Reflecting the reservations in Washington, the message asked what effect delaying the coup would have.

Replying the following day, Lodge gave a favorable assessment of coup prospects; expressed confidence in the generals who were to lead it, especially Minh, Khanh, and Kim; and argued, "that chances of success would be diminished by delay." 40/ A cable from Harkins to Taylor on the same day is the first documentary indication of Harkins' reservations about supporting the coup attempt. Cryptically, Harkins indicated that he would offer his full support to the Ambassador in implementing State's instructions, but noted that, "Reference b. (CINCPAC 2504562 Aug 1963) advises me that reference a. (State 243) embodies CINCPAC opinion and that my support had been volunteered." 41/ He would have preferred one last attempt to persuade Diem to dispense with Nhu. Furthermore, the line-up of forces did not indicate a clear-cut advantage for the coup plotters. Therefore, he stated, "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." 42/ He also had concluded that the coup would not take place until we gave the word. In a separate message, Richardson, however, described the situation as having "reached the point of no return." 43/ Further, he concluded, "Unless the generals are neutralized before being able to launch their operation, we believe they will act and that they have good chance to win." 44/

In Washington, State and Defense were divided on the issue. Nolting, who was regularly attending the daily NSC meetings at the President's request, sided with the Pentagon in the view that prospects for the coup were not good, and that another effort should be made with Diem. Hilsman, Harriman, and Ball were convinced the U.S. had to get on with the coup, since Diem offered no prospect of complying the U.S. wishes. 45/ The discussions in the NSC, reportedly, were increasingly heated and testy. 46/ The division of opinion between Harkins and Lodge concerned the President and upon receipt of their respective messages on August 28, he cabled each of them separately for their "independent judgment" about the prospects for a coup and their personal advice on the course the U.S. should pursue. The President was at pains to reiterate his great confidence in both men, and to assure them that differences of opinion in Washington would not prevent the U.S. government from acting as a unit under his direction. 47/ In a separate message, State asked Lodge to indicate the latest point at which the operation could be suspended, and with what consequences; since U.S. prestige would be engaged in the venture, the message stated, once the coup were under way, it had to succeed. 48/ Lodge was also asked what actions the U.S. might take to promote the coup.

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*Sentence attached in c  
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On August 29, Colonel Conein and Mr. Spera met with Generals Khiem and Minh. Minh bluntly said that the generals had to be cautious until they had clear evidence that the U.S. would not betray them to Nhu. They were unwilling to discuss their plans, and when asked what would constitute a sign of U.S. support, replied that the U.S. should stop economic aid to the regime. 49/ In a subsequent separate contact with Rufus Phillips, General Kim asked for verification that the Minh-Conein meeting had Lodge's approval. After checking with Lodge, Phillips assured Kim who then asked for a meeting to discuss planning on the next day. Lodge then authorized CAS to assist in tactical planning. 50/

Stressing the generals' reported lack of confidence in U.S. support, Lodge's reply to Washington asked Presidential permission for Harkins to show CAS messages to the generals to prove our commitment. If that failed, he reluctantly recommended suspension of economic aid as they requested. Typical of the Ambassador's all-out support for the coup is the following summary he gave of the U.S. position:

We are launched on a course from which there is no respectable turning back: The overthrow of the Diem Government. There is no turning back in part because US 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. 51/

Harkins, on the other hand, felt that there was still time to make one last approach to Diem, without endangering the plotters, since their plans did not appear fully mature yet. Diem should be handed an ultimatum that the Nhus must go. This, he felt, would strengthen the hand of the generals whose opposition, like ours, was to the Nhus, not Diem. If Diem did not act, there would then be time to back a move by the generals. 52/

These views were all reviewed at the noon meeting of the NSC on August 29. At the meeting, McNamara backed Harkins' view in favor of a final approach to Diem, but the issue was not decided. 53/ Rusk took up the question in a subsequent cable to Lodge, asking Lodge's opinion about an approach to Diem, possibly by the generals at a time when they would be ready to act, in which they would insist on the removal of the Nhus, and threaten withdrawal of U.S. support. 54/ A separate State cable to Lodge and Harkins authorized the latter to show CAS cables to the generals to prove our support. Harkins was instructed to insist on knowing the personnel involved in the coup, and the forces available, and to ask to review the detailed plans, without, however, directly involving himself in the coup planning. Lodge was authorized to suspend aid to Diem, "at a time and under conditions of your choice." 55/

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In his response to Rusk's cable, Lodge stoutly opposed any further contact with Diem, even to present an ultimatum. Agreeing that removal of the Nhus was the prime objective, Lodge argued, "This surely cannot be done by working through Diem. In fact, Diem will oppose it. He wishes he had more Nhus, not less. The best chance of doing it is by the generals taking over the government lock, stock and barrel. After this has been done, it can then be decided whether to put Diem back in again or go on without him." 56/ What genuinely concerned Lodge at that point was the lack of action by the generals, but he was reluctant to use the aid suspension as a lever.

Throughout this period, another CAS officer had been in contact with a Colonel Thao, an inspector of strategic hamlets, who was the leader of an independent junior officer-civilian plot. On August 30, he told the CAS officer that he was in touch with the generals, and would support any move they might make, but that for the moment the plans of his group had stopped because the risk of failure was too great. 57/

With Lodge's anxiety at the generals' failure to act increasing daily, General Harkins met with General Khiem on August 31. He was told that Minh had called off the coup for the time being because of the inability to achieve a favorable balance of forces in the Saigon area, and because of continuing anxiety among the generals about Richardson's close identification with the Nhus. 58/ Both Richardson and Lodge confirmed the end of this coup attempt on the same day. 59/ Apparently unable to win over General Dinh, the Saigon III Corps area commander, Minh had decided not to risk an indecisive, protracted blood bath with only a slim likelihood of success. Three factors appear to have been important in Minh's decision to abort the coup: (1) the failure to win over Dinh, leaving the coup forces at a tactical disadvantage in the Saigon area; (2) continuing doubts about the firmness of the U.S. commitment to Diem's overthrow and the related concern that the U.S. had wittingly or unwittingly tipped off Nhu to the plot; and (3) uncertainty about the cohesion of the coup group and the firmness of plans. Lodge concluded somewhat bitterly, ". . . there is neither the will nor the organization among the generals to accomplish anything." 60/ He did not, however, rule out a future attempt.

3. Toward a New Policy

Having at long last decided to seek an alternative to the Diem regime by sanctioning a coup, only to have the attempt fail, the U.S. found itself at the end of August 1963 without a policy and with most of its bridges burned. In both Saigon and Washington, the reappraisal and the search for alternatives began anew. In the cable acknowledging the demise of the coup plot on August 31, Lodge suggested that:

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

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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. 61/

These suggestions became the basis of discussion of a "where do we go from here" NSC meeting on the same day.

In the absence of the President, Secretary Rusk chaired the meeting at the State Department, and called for consideration of the Lodge proposals, but said he felt it was unrealistic to start off by asserting that Nhu must go. 62/ Secretary McNamara urged that we "establish quickly and firmly our line of communication between Lodge, Harkins and the GVN." He pointed out that "at the moment our channels of communication are essentially broken" and that "they should be reinstated at all costs." 63/ These considerations were soon submerged, however, in a broader discussion of the negative impact of the regime's actions on the war effort. Hilsman, supported by State's Kattenburg of the Vietnam Working Group, argued that we should not continue our support of a Nhu-dominated regime because its repressive policies would eventually have a disastrous effect on the war, even if the statistics did not yet reveal their negative impact. 64/ Hilsman and Kattenburg pointed to the growing disaffection and restiveness of middle level bureaucrats and military officers as a factor which would steadily erode the military effort. 65/ Unconvinced, both Secretary McNamara and General Taylor asked for evidence of this development.

Kattenburg offered his estimate that we would be thrown out of the country in six months if the regime remained in power and that the question the meeting should be considering was "the decision to get out honorably." 66/ Taylor and Nolting immediately took exception to these views and Secretary Rusk remarked that they were "largely speculative." 67/ He continued, "that it would be far better for us to start on the firm basis of two things -- that we will not pull out of Vietnam until the war is won, and that we will not run a coup." 68/ Secretary McNamara and Vice President Johnson supported Rusk's views, the Vice President saying he had never really seen an alternative to Diem. The meeting ended inconclusively; the only decision taken was to ask for Lodge's advice.

As the only documented meeting during this period of major policy deliberation, the August 31 meeting is significant for the viewpoints it reveals. Rambling inability to focus the problem, indeed to reach common agreement on the nature of the problem, reflects disorientation in the aftermath of the initial failure. More importantly, however, the meeting is the first recorded occasion in which someone followed to its logical conclusion the negative analysis of the situation -- i.e., that the war could not be won with the Diem regime, yet its removal would

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leave such political instability as to foreclose success in the war: for the first time, it was recognized that the U.S. should be considering methods of honorably disengaging itself from an irretrievable situation. The other alternative, not fully appreciated until the year following, was a much greater U.S. involvement in and assumption of responsibility for the war. At this point, however, the negative analysis of the impact of the political situation on the war effort was not shared by McNamara, Taylor, Krulak, nor seemingly by Rusk.

But discussions were overtaken by events. On the following Monday, September 2, the President, appearing on the initial broadcast of the CBS Evening News, was interviewed by Walter Cronkite:

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 here, quite obviously.

President Kennedy. 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 two 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 has time to regain the support of the people?

President Kennedy. 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. 69/

Confronted by the necessity of public comment, the President had spoken boldly and forthrightly. The President's call for changes of policy and personnel patently conveyed the message that the Buddhist repressions must end, and the Nhus must go. Later in the same interview, however, the President had said, ". . . I don't agree with those who say we should withdraw. That would be a great mistake." 70/ As Hilsman summarized it later,



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We had embarked on a policy that avoided the extremes both of withdrawing from Vietnam or of actually taking part in direct action to change the Government. The policy was one of trying to discriminate by continuing to support those Vietnamese who were struggling against the Communists but maintaining the tension of our disapproval of Diem's and Nhu's repressive policies. 71/

It was, in effect, the policy Lodge had proposed.

Meanwhile in Saigon, Lodge had gone ahead with his proposals. He continued to avoid any official contact with Diem, but on September 2 he had his second meeting with Nhu (the first on August 27 was an inconclusive statement of positions on each side 72/) in company with the Italian Ambassador and the Papal Delegate. Nhu, perhaps encouraged by a collateral intercession of the French Ambassador, announced he intended to resign from the government for good and retire to Dalat. 73/ A GVN announcement would state that the progress of the program against the Viet Cong permitted his departure. Mme. Nhu was to leave Vietnam for a trip to Yugoslavia, Italy, and possibly the U.S. The Papal Delegate would arrange for Archbishop Thuc to leave the country. Some measures to ease Buddhist tensions would be taken and, as a public relations gesture, a prime minister would be appointed. These were all proposals which Lodge had initially advanced. But as the days passed, nothing happened and Lodge grew impatient. Contributing to his concern were the frequent and often contradictory rumors that Nhu was secretly dealing with Hanoi and/or the VC through the French and the Polish Ambassadors, both of whose governments favored a neutralist solution between North and South Vietnam. 74/

For the remainder of the week, the Italian Ambassador and the Papal Delegate urged Nhu to act on his promises to Lodge. On Friday, September 6, after they had stressed the urgency for action created by Senator Church's rumored aid-suspension resolution, Nhu went into a tirade and said he would not consider leaving the country. He did, however, say he would "formally" resign. 75/ On the following day, the Papal Delegate, who had condemned Archbishop Thuc's activity to the Vatican and received the Pope's support, got Thuc out of the country. 76/ Mme. Nhu left the country for Europe on September 9. The arrests of students by the regime, however, continued and stories of torture and atrocities began to circulate.

In Washington, the NSC met on September 6 and renewed the discussion of reopening "tough negotiations" with Diem. 77/ Lodge, of course, opposed this while continuing his dialogue with Nhu. But others at the meeting (presumably including McNamara on the basis of his views at the August 31 meeting) urged that Lodge be instructed to make another approach to Diem. Lodge was accordingly instructed to clarify for Diem the U.S. position and explain the difficult position his policy placed us in with respect to U.S. and world opinion. 78/

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Perhaps the most important discussion at the meeting was that engendered by Robert Kennedy over the fundamental purpose of the U.S. involvement. According to Hilsman, Robert Kennedy said:

As he understood it we were there to help the people resisting a Communist take-over. The first question was whether a Communist take-over could be successfully resisted with any government. If it could not, now was the time to get out of Vietnam entirely, rather than waiting. If the answer was that it could, but not with a Diem-Nhu government as it was now constituted, we owed it to the people resisting Communism in Vietnam to give Lodge enough sanctions to bring changes that would permit successful resistance. But the basic question of whether a Communist take-over could be successfully resisted with any government had not been answered, and he was not sure that anyone had enough information to answer it. 79/

Kennedy's trenchant analysis, however, did not generate a searching reappraisal of U.S. policy. It did stimulate further efforts to get more information on the situation. McNamara proposed sending General Krulak on an immediate fact-finding trip. It was agreed that a senior Foreign Service Officer with Vietnam experience, Joseph Mendenhall, would accompany him, and that they would bring John Mecklin, the USIS director, and Rufus Phillips, the director of rural programs for USOM, back with them to report. 80/ Krulak and Mendenhall left later that day. State, for its part, sent Saigon a long comprehensive cable of questions on Vietnamese attitudes at all levels of society. 81/

The purpose of the Krulak-Mendenhall mission was to assess, in Krulak's words, "the effect of recent events upon the attitudes of the Vietnamese in general, and upon the war effort against the Viet Cong." 82/ In a whirlwind four-day trip, the two men visited throughout Vietnam and returned to Washington to report. Krulak went to ten different locations in all four corps areas and spoke with the Ambassador, General Harkins and his staff, 87 U.S. advisors, and 22 Vietnamese officers. 83/ Mendenhall went to Saigon, Hue, Da Nang, and several other provincial cities and talked primarily to old Vietnamese friends. Not surprisingly, their estimates of the situation were almost completely opposite.

The NSC convened on the morning of September 10, immediately after their return, to hear their reports. Krulak gave a very optimistic appraisal of the progress of the war and discounted the effect of the political crisis on the army. The following, in his own words, were his general conclusions:

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.

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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. 84/

This sanguine view of the situation was forcefully disputed by Mendenhall. He argued that the disaffection with the regime had reached the point where a breakdown of civil government was threatened, and the possibility of a religious civil war could not be excluded. The war could not be won with the present regime, he concluded. 85/ The polar opposition of these two reports prompted Kennedy's now famous query, "You two did visit the same country, didn't you?" 86/

The critical failure of both reports was to understand the fundamental political role that the army was coming to play in Vietnam. It was the only potential force with sufficient power to constitute an alternative to Diem. Diem and Nhu fully understood this fact, and had coped with it by usurping the prerogative of senior officer promotion, and basing those promotions on loyalty to the palace. This had sown deep seeds of distrust among the senior military men, and fragmented their potential power. Krulak failed to see that once the internal political situation deteriorated to the point where massive disaffection with the regime threatened a communist victory, the generals would unite and plunge into politics out of common necessity. But more importantly, neither Krulak nor Mendenhall seemed to anticipate that, if the army achieved power, the divisive effect of Diem's preferential promotion policies would surface in an internal army power struggle. Nor did they fully understand the negative effect on the war effort this pre-occupation with politics among the generals would have.

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Nolting took issue with Mendenhall's appraisal, noting that Mendenhall had been pessimistic about prospects in Vietnam for several years. But John Mecklin, the USIS director, corroborated Mendenhall's view, and pushed it even further, saying that the U.S. should apply direct pressure, such as suspension of non-military aid, to bring about a change of government. In Mecklin's words:

This would unavoidably be dangerous. There was no way to be sure how events would develop. It was possible, for example, that the Vietnamese forces might fragment into warring factions, or that the new government would be so incompetent and/or unstable that the effort against the Viet Cong would collapse. The US should therefore resolve now to introduce American combat forces if necessary to prevent a Communist triumph amidst the debris of the Diem regime. 87/

Mecklin appreciated the potential for instability inherent in any army successor regime that Krulak and Mendenhall had not seen. But he, nevertheless, concluded that we should proceed to bring about a change of government, accept the consequences, and contemplate the introduction of U.S. combat troops to stave off a Viet Cong victory.

The meeting went on to hear Rufus Phillips' dour report on the situation in the Delta, and his doubts about the validity of Krulak's optimistic outlook on the military situation. 88/ Phillips argued that this was primarily a political contest for the allegiance of people, not a military war, and that the Diem regime was losing it. The Strategic Hamlet Program was a shambles in the field, especially in the Delta. The meeting ended on this note and no decisions were made.

One course of action being given increasing consideration in these meetings, as well as in Saigon and on Capitol Hill, was a suspension of non-military aid to Diem. After the erroneous VOA announcement of aid suspension on August 26, Lodge had been authorized on August 29, as already noted, to suspend aid at his discretion if it would facilitate the coup. Lodge had been reluctant to do so. The question had been raised again in a joint State/AID cable to Lodge on September 3 which listed the items currently up for approval or renewal. 89/ Lodge was informed that all approval for non-military aid would be temporarily held up but that no suspension was to be announced, since such a policy decision was still pending. Lodge took advantage of this by having the mission, and especially USOM, reply to all GVN inquiries about the status of the aid renewals or approvals that President Diem would have to talk to Lodge about it. Meanwhile, the U.S. Senate began to put pressure on the Administration to do something about Diem. Hilsman was badgered by the Senate Subcommittee on the Far East, and there were threats of further cuts in the AID bill if something wasn't done. Senator Church informed the Administration he intended to introduce soon a resolution condemning Diem's repressions against the Buddhists and calling for an end of aid to South Vietnam unless they were abandoned.

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He agreed to delay its introduction temporarily so as not to embarrass the Administration. 90/

The idea of a selective aid suspension to goad Diem into action was actively discussed at State during the Krulak-Mendenhall mission, and later John Mecklin had specifically suggested it to the NSC. 91/ On September 8, AID Director David Bell warned in a TV interview that the Congress might cut aid to South Vietnam if the Diem government did not change its policies. 92/ On Monday, September 9, however, the President, in a TV interview for the new Huntley-Brinkley News, said, "I don't think we think that (a reduction of U.S. aid to South Vietnam) would be helpful at this time." 93/ On September 11, the day after the President received the Krulak-Mendenhall reports, Lodge reversed his previous position, and in a long cable proposed that detailed consideration be given to ways in which non-military aid suspension might be used as a sanction to topple the government. 94/ He had concluded we could not get satisfaction from Diem, and had to face up to the unpleasant task of forcing events. This view was reinforced the next day in a long series of cables replying to State's September 7 request for a comprehensive evaluation of South Vietnamese attitudes. 95/

Lodge's proposal, and a proposal by Hilsman for a combined set of public and private measures to bring pressure on Diem, formed the basis of a White House meeting on September 11. 96/ On the following day, Senator Church was given the green light and introduced his resolution. On September 14, Lodge was informed that approval of the \$18.5 million remainder of the commercial import program (the principal piastre support, anti-inflation aid device) was deferred until basic U.S. policy decisions had been made. 97/ The decision on aid suspension was now absorbed into the broader consideration of a set of coordinated measures to put pressure on the GVN.

Throughout September, the division of opinion within the U.S. mission in Saigon had grown sharper and sharper. Harkins, Richardson, and to a lesser extent Brent (Director of USOM), did not believe that the Diem government's bungling of the Buddhist crisis and loss of popular support were threatening the war effort, or that the crisis was as serious as Lodge, Mecklin, Mendenhall, et al., portrayed it. In any case, the situation was not so irretrievable as to require a U.S. abandonment of Diem in a risky venture at coup-making towards an unknown alternative. 98/ The opposite view was held by Lodge, Truehart, Mecklin, Phillips, and the majority of the junior officers in the mission. By mid-September, the debate had reached a shrill and acrimonious level, as the following excerpt from a Harkins' cable to Taylor indicates:

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. 99/

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The situation was of such concern that CIA dispatched a special officer to reach an independent evaluation. His conclusion was that we had hastily expended our capability to overthrow the regime, that an aid suspension would not guarantee a constructive result, and that to prevent further political fragmentation we should adopt a "business as usual" policy to buy time. 100/ Amidst all this internal U.S. dissension, the GVN announced on September 14 that martial law would end on September 16 and that National Assembly elections would be held September 27. 101/

In Washington, the NSC convened again September 17 to consider two alternative proposals for dealing with Diem prepared by Hilsman. The first, which Hilsman and others at State favored, was the "pressures and persuasion track," and involved an escalatory ladder of measures both public and private, including selective aid suspension, to coerce Diem into getting rid of Nhu and taking steps to restore the political situation. 102/ The alternative proposal, the "reconciliation with a rehabilitated GVN track," involved a public posture of acquiescence in recent GVN actions, recognition that Diem and Nhu were inseparable, and a decision to salvage as much as possible from a bad situation. This, of course, would have involved a reopening of the dialogue with Diem, to which Lodge was opposed. Both proposals assumed that for the moment a coup was out of the question.

There are no available records of what transpired in the meeting, but two decisions were clearly made. The first was, in effect, to adopt Hilsman's "pressures and persuasion" proposal. The guidance cable to Lodge after the meeting, however, came from the White House. It stated that,

We see no good opportunity for action to remove present government in immediate future; therefore, as your most recent message suggests, we must, for the present, apply such pressures as are available to secure whatever modest improvements on the scene may be possible. . . . Such a course, moreover, is consistent with more drastic effort as and when means became available. 103/

Lodge was to press for a reduction of Nhu's authority and his departure from Saigon, at least temporarily. The cable included a long list of other measures for the GVN to take to redress the political situation and gave Lodge complete control over the aid program to enhance his bargaining position.

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. 104/

There is no evidence on the degree of consensus of the principals in this decision.

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Lodge replied to the new policy guidance on September 19 in a generally negative vein. 105/ The proposals for specific actions by the GVN had all been previously suggested to Diem without any results, and Lodge was not optimistic about their adoption now. He specifically felt that he should not be required to make a futile overture to Diem. The Ambassador's aloofness was beginning to cause official concern at the palace, and he felt he should press views on the Ngo family only when they initiated the contact. He did not think a public relations effort was likely to have any effect on the regime, whose appreciation of questions of public support was virtually nil. Withholding aid was another delicate matter that did not offer great prospects of success. Lodge was particularly concerned that such action would impede the war effort or damage the economy, but have no real effect on the regime. No doubt recalling the generals' previous request for an aid suspension as a sign of U.S. support, Lodge expressed his view that any suspension of aid should be timed to coincide with another coup attempt and should be used to facilitate it. He was troubled by the opinion expressed by both General Minh and Secretary Thuan privately within the previous two days that the war was going very badly and the VC were winning. In general, he felt that a patient "let them come to me" tactic was more likely to have results, unless a real coup possibility emerged, which he felt we should back.

4. The McNamara-Taylor Mission

The second decision to come out of the September 17 NSC meeting was to adopt a suggestion of Secretary McNamara for another fact-finding mission, this time by himself and General Taylor, Chairman of the JCS. 106/

Lodge reacted immediately to the proposed McNamara-Taylor mission, pointing out to the President that such a visit would require a call on Diem that would be construed by the regime as a return to business as usual. 107/ Since he had been consciously pursuing a policy of official aloofness, he wondered whether such a high level visit was desirable. Furthermore, it coincided with the proposed National Assembly elections on September 27, and could not but be construed as an indication of the lack of importance we attached to them. But the President was insistent, and Lodge acquiesced, suggesting that the public announcement state that Lodge had requested the visit. 108/ After an exchange of alternative phraseology, it was agreed that the release would say that the President had decided to send the mission after consultation with Lodge. It was so announced on September 21. 109/

The President's instructions to McNamara described the purpose of the mission in the following terms:

I am asking you to go because of my desire to have the best possible on-the-spot appraisal of the military and paramilitary effort to defeat the Viet Cong....The events in South Vietnam since May have now raised serious questions

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both about the present prospects for success against the Viet Cong and still more about the future effectiveness of this effort unless there can be important political improvement in the country. It is in this context that I now need your appraisal of the situation. If the prognosis in your judgment is not hopeful, I would like your views on what action must be taken by the South Vietnamese Government and what steps our Government should take to lead the Vietnamese to that action.

...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. 110/

The purpose, thus, was fourfold: (1) appraise the war effort; (2) assess the impact on that effort of recent political developments; (3) recommend a course of action for the GVN and for the U.S.; and (4) examine with Lodge ways of tailoring our aid to achieve our foreign policy objectives. In a statement to the press at Andrews Air Force Base just before leaving for Vietnam on September 23, Secretary McNamara said that the purpose of the trip was, "...to determine whether that military effort has been adversely affected by the unrest of the past several weeks." 111/

Both Schlesinger and Hilsman, however, contend that Kennedy sent McNamara and Taylor to Vietnam to convince them of the negative effect on the war effort that the protracted political crisis was having, and of the necessity of applying sanctions to the Diem regime to bring about change. According to this argument, the President felt he could not afford a major policy rift in the Administration over applying sanctions, especially the opposition of the powerful JCS, and concluded that only McNamara, if convinced, could bring the military along. 112/

Whatever the exact purpose of the trip, the party left Washington on September 23 and returned ten days later, on October 2, after an exhausting trip and a comprehensive review of the situation.

The divergent views of the members of the U.S. mission about the relative progress of the war, and the effect on it of the political crisis, were exposed immediately in the opening session that McNamara and Taylor held in Saigon with the country team on September 25. General Harkins and the MACV staff generally presented a favorable picture of the war, emphasizing the progress of the strategic hamlet program, and the generally improved ARVN position, in spite of recent rises in VC initiated incidents and declines in ARVN operations related to the political turmoil. 113/ McNamara and Taylor prodded the briefers with questions trying to get comparative indicators of the situation over the previous two years. McNamara in particular pressed for details about the Delta. Lodge's and Mecklin's reading of recent events, and their estimate of war progress, differed sharply from that of General Harkins.



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Lodge stressed the more political and intangible aspects of the conflict and cast doubt on the "hardness" of the statistical data from MACV. With the Mission's division of opinion exposed and the issues joined, McNamara left to tour the country.

His subsequent itinerary took him throughout the country interviewing Americans and Vietnamese both at headquarters, and in the field. In Saigon, in the last few days of the visit, he was given extensive briefings by the civilian side of the Mission and, since he stayed with Lodge, had ample opportunity for discussions with the Ambassador.

On September 29, McNamara, Taylor, Harkins, and Lodge called on Diem, after having previously decided against delivery of a stiff letter from Kennedy. 114/ After a two-hour monologue by Diem, McNamara was finally able to stress the U.S. concern that political unrest was undermining the war effort. 115/ He stressed the problem that repressions were creating for President Kennedy because of aroused public opinion. But he did not ask for the removal of the Nhu's, a matter Washington had left to his and Lodge's discretion. All this seems to have had little impact on Diem, however. Diem had asked Taylor for his appraisal of the war, and with the approval of McNamara, a long letter from Taylor was delivered to Diem on October 2. The letter pointedly outlined the major military problems in the Delta, warned of the danger to the war effort of the political crisis, and listed many of the specific steps needed to improve the military effort that subsequently appeared in the report to the President. The letter summed up with a terse, tough statement of the U.S. view:

In closing, Mr. President, may I give you my most important over-all 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 tranquility on the home front 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 community. 116/

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On September 30, their last day in Vietnam, McNamara and Taylor, together with Lodge, met with Vice President Tho. Tho said that the U.S., after Taylor's report in 1961, had responded to the Vietnam situation promptly and efficiently, but that recently we had failed to use our strength and influence intelligently to prevent the current political deterioration. 117/ But he had no methods to suggest. Later he sharply questioned the success of the Strategic Hamlet Program, and said that increased Viet Cong strength had to be attributed to widespread peasant disaffection with the government. These views, from the man most often mentioned in U.S. circles as an alternative to Diem, coming at the end of the visit as they did, must have had an important influence on McNamara's conclusions. Later that day the party left Vietnam to return home.

During the briefings for McNamara, Lodge had raised again his doubts about the efficacy of aid suspension as a lever against Diem, but had also expressed his concern that the foreign aid bill would be penalized in Congress for Diem's repressions. 118/ Lodge reiterated in his cables to Washington during the visit his belief that an aid suspension could boomerang and alienate the population as well as the regime. 119/ Aware, no doubt, that an aid suspension was a potential recommendation of the mission, Brent went on record against it, too. 120/ Both views were important because McNamara and Taylor had been specifically charged by the President with examining ways to make our aid serve our foreign policy goals, and their briefing papers included a program-by-program consideration of the impact of aid suspension prepared by AID-Washington. 121/

After a one-day stop in Honolulu to prepare their report, McNamara and Taylor arrived back in Washington on October 2 and promptly met with the President and the NSC. Their report concluded that the "military campaign has made great progress and continues to progress." 122/ But it warned that the serious political tensions in Saigon and the increasing unpopularity of Diem and Nhu could abet the then limited restiveness of some ARVN officers and erode the favorable military trends. They reported no evidence of a successful coup in the making, and felt that U.S. pressure would probably only further harden the regime's attitudes. Nevertheless, "unless such pressures are exerted, they (Diem-Nhu) are almost certain to continue past patterns of behavior." 123/

The report's military recommendations were that General Harkins should review the war effort with Diem with a view toward its successful conclusion in I, II, and III Corps by the end of 1964 and in the Delta by the end of 1965. This would necessitate: (a) a shift in military emphasis and strength to the Delta; (b) an increased tempo of military activity throughout the country; (c) an emphasis on "clear and hold operations"; (d) a consolidation of the Strategic Hamlet Program with the emphasis on security; and (e) the fleshing out of combat units and better training and arms for the hamlet militia. It was further proposed that an announcement be made of the planned withdrawal of 1,000 U.S. troops by the end of

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1963 in connection with a program to train Vietnamese to replace Americans in all essential functions by 1965.

To bring political pressure on the Diem regime to end its repressive policies, the following measures were recommended: (a) a continued withholding of funds in the commodity import program, but without formal announcement; (b) suspension of approval of AID loans for the Saigon-Cholon Waterworks and the Saigon Electric Power Project; (c) suspension of support for Colonel Tung's forces unless they were transferred to the field and placed under JGS authority; (d) maintenance of purely "correct" relations between the Ambassador and Diem (General Harkins' contact with the regime not to be suspended, however). In subsequent evaluations of the success of these sanctions, the report stated:

...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.  
124/

Finally, the report recommended against our actively encouraging a coup, although it recommended seeking "urgently to identify and build contacts with an alternative leadership if and when it appears." 125/

The report is a curiously contradictory document. It was, no doubt, a compromise between General Harkins' view of the war's progress as supported by General Taylor, and Secretary McNamara's growing conviction of the gravity of the political crisis and its dire potential for the war effort. Its recommendations for aid suspensions and the announcement of U.S. troop withdrawals were obviously designed as measures, short of a withdrawal of U.S. support, that would create doubt within the Diem regime about U.S. intentions and incentives for policy changes. 126/ The fact that these sanctions would be seen by the generals as a signal of our willingness to accept alternative leadership -- i.e., a coup -- does not seem to have figured in the recommendation, however, because elsewhere the report specifically rules out U.S. encouragement of "a change of government." 127/ This is an important lapse in view of the generals' clear statement in August that they would regard an aid suspension as a coup signal.

Nevertheless, the recommendations of the Mission met with swift approval at the NSC on October 2, and later that day Secretary McNamara made the Presidentially approved statement to the press that included the announcement of the 1,000 man troop withdrawal by the end of the year. 128/ The statement reiterated the U.S. commitment to the struggle against insurgency and aggression in South Vietnam, noted the progress of the war,

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announced the troop withdrawal, and dissociated the U.S. from the GVN's repressive policies. It avoided, however, any reference to economic aid suspensions or other sanctions against the regime, thereby giving Diem a chance to come around without a public loss of face.

On October 5, the President approved the specific military recommendations of the McNamara-Taylor 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." 129/ The details of how the new policy would be applied were spelled out in a long cable to Lodge following this meeting. The purpose of the new course of action was described at the beginning of the message:

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.

The recommendations on negotiations are concerned with what U.S. 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 U.S. 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 the same time, maintain sufficient flexibility to permit U.S. to resume full support of Diem regime at any time U.S. Government deems it appropriate. 130/

The cable goes on to acknowledge that the proposed sanctions can only be applied for 2-4 months before they begin to adversely affect the military effort, and therefore when that begins to happen recognizes that, "...further major decisions will be required." 131/

The specific actions to be taken included: (1) suspension of the commodity import program without public announcement; (2) selective suspension of PL 480, on an item-by-item, sometimes monthly, basis, after referral to Washington for review; (3) suspension of the loans for the Saigon-Cholon Waterworks and the Saigon Electric Power Project; (4) notification to the GVN that financial support of Colonel Tung's forces would be contingent on their commitment to field operations under JGS control, again without public announcement. Lodge was instructed to maintain his policy of "cool correctness in order to make Diem come to you," but to be

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prepared to re-establish contact later if it did not work. Specifically he was to seek improvements in the GVN military effort, as outlined in the McNamara-Taylor report; in the GVN's internal policies that would restore popular confidence; and in the GVN's international (particularly American) public image and its attitudes and actions toward the U.S. Once again, however, the discussion of this new program of pressures did not allude to their impact on the military nor how a coup initiative by the generals, stemming from such measures, should be dealt with.

Thus, the Kennedy Administration, after a long month of searching deliberations had made a far-reaching decision on American policy toward South Vietnam. It had chosen to take the difficult and risky path of positive pressures against an ally to obtain from him compliance with our policies. To our good fortune, that policy was to be implemented by an Ambassador who not only supported it, but was uniquely equipped by background and temperament to make it succeed.

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IV

THE COUP MATURES - OCTOBER 2-NOVEMBER 1

1. The South Vietnamese Situation in October

Through the month of September the GVN resorted to police state tactics ever more frequently. The regime, now more than ever under Nhu's dominance, lifted martial law September 16, but repressions against the Buddhist clergy continued unabated. Students, down to the grade school level, were arrested and detained for the most minor of protests. Civil servants came under pressure to avoid contact with Americans, and to demonstrate their loyalty to the ruling family. Regime-inspired rumors of impending mob attacks on U.S. facilities, and assassination lists of prominent Americans circulated regularly. 1/ Then, on October 5, at noon in the central market place, another Buddhist monk burned himself to death, the first self-immolation since the pagoda raids. 2/

In this tense atmosphere, elections for the National Assembly were held on September 27 after a pro forma one-week campaign. Predictably, GVN candidates won overwhelming victories. The new assembly convened on October 7 to hear President Diem's state of the union message. Diem spoke mainly of South Vietnam's past and present progress, playing down the internal political crisis, and made only scant reference to U.S. assistance. 3/ As might have been expected, he threw the blame for the Buddhist crisis on the Communists, foreign adventurers, and the Western press.

On the same day, Mme. Nhu arrived in the U.S. after a month in Europe to begin a three-week speaking tour. She immediately launched into shrill denunciations of the Buddhists and of U.S. policy that progressively alienated U.S. public opinion. She was followed around the country by her father, the former Ambassador to the United States, however, who acted as a one-man truth squad revealing the inaccuracies and distortions of her statements. The Administration's dignified and temperate reaction further discredited her attacks. On October 8, the UN General Assembly voted to send a fact-finding team to South Vietnam to investigate the charges of repressions against Buddhists.

2. The New American Policy

Lodge's immediate reaction to the new policy approach was enthusiastic, "an excellent instruction outlining a course of action which should yield constructive results." 4/ With the exception of the aid suspension, his views, in essence, had prevailed with both McNamara and the President, the standard public kudos to military progress notwithstanding. His plan was to allow the suspension of the commodity import program, the largest and most important of the economic sanctions, to become

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evident without making any mention of it, and, by maintaining his aloofness from official contact, force the regime to come to him. 5/ On October 7, however, Lodge expressed some doubts about the real value of the political concessions itemized in State's instructions if our real goal was removal of Nhu, an objective of questionable feasibility under the current circumstances. 6/ In view of Nhu's increasing hostility to the U.S. presence and influence, Lodge felt a request from the regime for a U.S. withdrawal was a distinct possibility.

That same day, the regime's reaction to the aid cut-off hit the streets with banner headlines in its mouthpiece, the Times of Vietnam: "USOM Freezes Economic Aid Program." 7/ The article accused the U.S. of subverting the war effort, and asserted that the cut-off had been decided in mid-September. Such fantastic pressure for petty reforms would jeopardize the entire revolutionary program of the government, it concluded. Lodge made no comment on the story.

In mid-October, Lodge was requested to provide Washington with a weekly evaluation of the effects, both positive and negative, of the new policy. 8/ Lodge's October 16 reply summarized the situation as follows: "So far we appear to be getting virtually no effect from our actions under DEPTTEL 534, but we would not have expected effects this early." 9/ Other reports indicated that the regime was preparing to take a number of belt-tightening measures, including reductions in civil service salaries; that Chinese businessmen and bankers had begun to get jittery about currency stability; and that the government was planning to draw down its foreign exchange reserves to sustain import levels in the face of the U.S. cut-off of CIP funds. 10/ A CIA memorandum concluded that the GVN reaction to the new U.S. policy, particularly the violent anti-U.S. campaign in the Times of Vietnam and the surveillance and harassment of Americans and their employees, indicated that Diem and Nhu were preparing for a long fight and were unmoved by the new policy. 11/

Under Lodge's instructions, General Stillwell (MACV - J-3) met with Secretary Thuan on October 17 and informed him of the impending cut-off of funds for the Special Forces, both MAP and CIA, unless the three CIA-funded companies under Colonel Tung's command were placed under JGS control and transferred to the field. 12/ Thuan said he would take the matter up with Diem immediately. Harkins informed Diem directly of this action in a letter on October 18. 13/ General Don and Colonel Tung were also personally advised of the action, but again no public announcement was made. On October 26 it was learned that Tung and JGS were working on plans to transfer his Special Forces to the Central Highlands. 14/ By then, however, coup plans were well advanced and the significance of this transfer must be understood therein.

Militarily, in October while the GVN had taken some minor steps in line with the McNamara-Taylor recommendations (such as agreeing to

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realign III and IV Corps boundaries to give added emphasis to the Delta war), the combat situation continued to worsen. The tempo of VC attacks, particularly in the Delta, increased; the weapons-loss ratio and casualty ratios deteriorated; and GVN "missing in action" increased. 15/ In Washington, further doubt was cast on the optimism of previous reports by a controversial State Department research study of October 22. 16/ The memorandum took issue with encouraging conclusions about the progress of the military campaign derived from statistical trends, pointing out important unfavorable trends revealed by the same statistical data. In Saigon, MACV continued unsuccessfully to press Diem to take further steps to strengthen the war effort.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Mission had been feeling the impact of the new policy in internal strains of its own. Hilsman reports that Lodge decided early in October that the recall of John Richardson, the CIA chief in Saigon, would be a useful additional pressure against Nhu because they had been closely identified during Nolting's ambassadorship, and because Richardson was known to favor a more conciliatory approach to the regime. 17/ While there are no cables in the available files to confirm it, Hilsman maintains that Lodge sent a private message to the President and CIA Director McCone requesting Richardson's transfer. The President agreed, McCone acquiesced, and Richardson was returned to Washington on October 5. Whatever other motives may have been involved, Richardson had, in fact, been the specific object of an attack in the U.S. press on October 2 that had accused him of insubordination and had compromised his identity. 18/ It is not surprising under such circumstances that he should have been transferred. Whatever the case, the press interpreted his recall as a slap at the regime, as Hilsman suggests Lodge wanted.

This was only an incident in the continuing series of stories by U.S. correspondents on divisions within the mission. Lodge's relations with the press, however, remained excellent throughout his tour. He consciously cultivated the U.S. press corps with private luncheons, "backgrounders," and occasional leaks, and it paid off for him personally. But the press sharply attacked those in the mission, like Richardson and Harkins, with whom they disagreed about U.S. policy. Washington registered its concern that these stories, whatever their origin, were damaging to the official posture of unity the U.S. Government was trying to maintain in the implementation of a difficult policy toward South Vietnam. 19/ But the stories continued, even after the coup.

In his weekly evaluation of the impact of the new U.S. policy on October 23, Lodge was not encouraged by the results to date. "Diem/Nhu give every appearance of sitting tight and reacting to U.S. pressure with counter pressure and implying through public statements that they can go it alone." 20/ Nevertheless, there were several straws in the wind. Secretary Thuan had reported that Diem was worried and that he had instructed Thuan to ask Lodge if Washington had reached any decisions on



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commercial imports. Lodge also felt that the regime was being more careful about repressive actions. Furthermore, experienced observers felt the U.S. policy was creating favorable conditions for a coup, although Lodge did not see anyone seriously considering it. The day after this message was sent, Lodge and his wife were invited by Diem to spend the next Sunday (the day after the National Day celebration) with him at his villa in Dalat, after visiting an agricultural station and a strategic hamlet. Lodge promptly accepted. Diem had made the first move.

Washington instructed Lodge to use the occasion of the trip with Diem to test for movement by the GVN on any of the U.S. demands. 21/ Lodge was to take advantage of any subject of interest that Diem brought up to determine both the willingness of the government to make concessions and the effect of our selective sanctions. If Diem did not provide such conversational opportunities, Lodge was to assume the initiative. In particular, he was to inquire about changes in the military campaign that had been recommended by the McNamara-Taylor mission and subsequently pressed by General Harkins; he was to suggest that Diem be cooperative to the UN investigatory team that had arrived in the country on October 24, and allow them full access to information and people; and he was to inquire whether Diem did not think it time to end the bitter anti-American campaign of the Times of Vietnam and the Nhus.

Lodge's Sunday with Diem on October 27, the day after the National Day celebration, was frustrating in almost all respects. Diem did bring up several issues of interest, but gave no indication that he had changed his position or his attitude about the Buddhists or the U.S. 22/ He did inquire about the suspension of the commercial import program to which Lodge inquired in reply about the release of Buddhists and students from jail, the reopening of the schools, and the elimination of anti-Buddhist discrimination. Diem offered excuses and complaints as usual. Taking the initiative, Lodge complained to Diem of the public opinion pressure that his policies were placing the President under in the U.S. He complained about the physical attacks on U.S. newsmen and about Mme Nhu's inflammatory remarks in the U.S. as examples of the kind of thing Diem could prevent that would enhance his public image in the U.S. and the world. Lodge describes the end of the conversation in this manner:

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 U.S. opinion?" As on other previous occasions when I asked him similar questions, he gave me a blank look and changed the subject. 23/

While Lodge saw no movement on the basis of the conversation, he nonetheless suggested that consideration be given in Washington to what we would

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consider adequate response on Diem's part for a resumption of the commercial import program. The following day, after Lodge had related the disappointing results of the conversation to Secretary Thuan over luncheon, the latter observed that the U.S. really wasn't asking much and that perhaps the conversation with Diem had been a beginning. 24/ In retrospect, the comment is ironic, for with the coup only five days away, the October 27 conversation was in reality a pathetic ending not a hopeful beginning.

At one level, attention now turned to Lodge's scheduled trip to Washington October 31. The exact purpose of the trip remains a mystery. On October 30, he sent a cable to Washington with some suggestions of steps by the GVN that Washington might consider adequate for resuming the commercial import program under various conditions, steps which he hoped to discuss when he arrived. 25/ However, earlier in October, Lodge had sent a private note to McGeorge Bundy, asking that the President make him available for a trip to Vietnam to discuss with Lodge a matter which Lodge did not feel free to enter into through any electronic communication channel. 26/ The following cryptic reference suggests that whatever the mysterious subject Lodge had in mind, it was the purpose for the planned trip to Washington at the end of October:

Regarding my wire, I appreciate your willingness to send Bundy. 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. I wired Bundy because I cannot leave here immediately, but I could come for one working day to Washington after Vietnamese National Day on October 26 and dedication of Vietnamese Atomic Energy Plant on October 28, returning here immediately thereafter, and would be glad to do it." 27/

In order to shorten Lodge's absence from Saigon and to add flexibility to his departure timing, the President dispatched a military aircraft to Saigon and left it at his disposal. But as the October 31 date arrived, it coincided with the momentary anticipation of a move by the generals. Lodge, no doubt preferred to remain in control of U.S. actions during a coup rather than see Harkins take over, as Washington's instructions for his absence stipulated, and so, he postponed his own departure.

### 3. Renewed Coup Plotting

While Diem's reaction to the tough new American policy was hostile, the senior South Vietnamese generals, predictably, interpreted the new policy as a green light for a coup. Plotting was reactivated almost immediately, if indeed it had ever been completely dormant.

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On October 2, the day the McNamara-Taylor mission reported to the President, General Don "accidentally" encountered Lt Colonel Conein, the CIA contact man in the August plot, at Tan Son Nhut airport and asked him to meet him that night in Nha Trang. 28/ Truehart approved the contact, instructing Conein to neither encourage nor discourage a coup but only to get information. At the meeting, General Don said that General Minh wanted to meet with Conein at 8:00 a.m. on October 5 at JGS headquarters at which time Minh would be able to go into the details of the generals' plan. Don emphatically stated that there was a plan, and that essential to it was the conversion of General Dinh, III Corps commander, to the cause.

So, with Lodge's approval, Conein met General Minh on October 5. Getting straight to the point, "General Minh stated that he must know American Government's position with respect to a change in the Government of Vietnam within the very near future." 29/ The government's loss of popular support was endangering the whole war effort, which was deteriorating rapidly. He did not expect any U.S. support, but needed assurances the U.S. would not thwart the attempt. Also involved, he said, were Generals Don, Khiem and Kim. Of three possible and not mutually exclusive plans mentioned by Minh, two involved military action against loyal units in Saigon, and one was an assassination plot against brothers Nhu and Can, but not Diem. Conein remained noncommittal about both U.S. support and the various plans. Minh then expressed doubt about General Khiem whom he suspected of having played a double role in August, but indicated that the generals would have to act soon to forestall abortive attempts by lower echelon officers. Minh hoped to meet with Conein in the near future to go over the detailed plan of operations. Conein was again noncommittal and Minh said he understood.

Lodge, with Harkins' concurrence, recommended that when Minh, about whom he was now dubious after his August experience, approached Conein again, he be told: (1) that the U.S. would not thwart his plans; (2) that we would be willing to review his plans, except those for assassinations; and (3) "that U.S. aid will be continued to Vietnam under government which gives promise of gaining support of people and winning the war against the Communists." 30/ In pressing Minh for details of the planned composition of a successor regime, Lodge felt we should stress the need for a "good proportion of well qualified civilian leaders in key positions." 31/

A message emanating from an NSC meeting was sent to Lodge on the same day and appears to have been dispatched before the arrival of the CAS report on the Conein-Minh meeting and Lodge's comment. In it the President specifically instructed Lodge to avoid encouraging a coup. The message stated:

...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

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of Ambassador to identify and build contacts with possible alternative leadership as and when it appears. Essential that this effort be totally secure and fully deniable and separated entirely from normal political analysis and reporting and other activities of country team. We repeat that this effort is not repeat not to be aimed at active promotion of coup but only at surveillance and readiness. In order to provide plausibility to denial suggest you and no one else in Embassy issue these instruction orally to Acting Station Chief and hold him responsible to you alone for making appropriate contacts and reporting to you alone. 32/

Responding the next day, October 6, to the report of the Conein-Minh meeting, Washington referred to the preceding day's cable, but, prompted by Lodge's suggestion, added:

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. 33/

Washington was, further, greatly concerned about the security and deniability of any further contacts and suggested to Lodge that someone could be brought in from outside Vietnam for follow-up contacts if he thought it necessary. Lodge apparently did not.

An important apparent lacuna in the available message traffic occurs at this point. By Shaplen's account, a CAS officer met with Minh on October 10 and conveyed the substance of the U.S. position as defined in CAP 14228. 34/ Whether or not the date is accurate, it is probable that some such contact took place by mid-October. On October 20 a Colonel Khuong at JGS contacted an American counterpart and reported a coup plot involving Minh, Khiem, Kim, and a fourth unidentified general, plus a number of colonels. 35/ He was seeking assurances of U.S. support following a coup.

There were no further reported contacts with the generals until October 23 when Conein again met with Don at the latter's initiative. 36/ In a state of agitation, Don stated that the coup had been scheduled to take advantage of the October 26 National Holiday, but that on October 22 Harkins had called on him to report the Khuong contact and to discourage a coup. Don further indicated that the palace had learned of Khuong's overtures, implying that Harkins was responsible, and had taken action

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to ensure that the vital 5th and 7th Divisions would be away from Saigon. Don demanded to know what the U.S. attitude was toward a coup. Conein reiterated the Washington guidance. Apparently relieved, Don asked Conein to assure Lodge that Khuong was not a member of the coup committee and would be punished. He indicated that the generals had avoided contacting Lodge directly at a party on October 18 because of the presence of members of Harkins' staff. Conein then asked for proof of the existence of the coup group and its plan. Don said that if they could meet the following day, he would give Conein, EYES ONLY for Lodge, the political organization plan.

In a subsequent conversation with Harkins on the matter, Lodge reported that Harkins confirmed his demarche to Don on October 22, and after they had reviewed CAP 74228, said he had misunderstood the policy and hoped he had not upset any delicate arrangements. 37/ Harkins added that he would inform Don that his previous statements did not reflect U.S. Government policy.

By Harkins' account, he had not violated Washington's guidance in his conversation with Don. 38/ He was merely trying to discourage Vietnamese officers from approaching U.S. counterparts about coup plots which only detracted from the war effort. Furthermore, Don had at no time mentioned coup planning to him. He concluded by commenting about the renewed plotting by the generals that:

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 that 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. 39/

This incident once again highlighted the differing outlooks of the Ambassador and MACV and underscored the lack of close coordination between them. Unfortunately, it did not lead to any improvement in the situation. The close identification of Harkins with Diem made the Vietnamese generals mistrust him. Lodge, responsive to their great sensitivity about security, tended to restrict information about the contacts and coup plans to himself.

In response to this contact by Don, Washington reflected mainly concern that he might be acting as an agent of the palace to lead us down the garden path. 40/ As he had indicated, Don contacted Conein on the morning of the 24th, but not with the promised plans. 41/ He reported that the previous evening Harkins had spoken to him, correcting his earlier statements about the nondesirability of a change of government. Don further said he had a scheduled meeting with Lodge that

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evening (which Lodge denied) and that plans were now far advanced for a coup sometime before November 2. He asked Conein to meet him later that afternoon to discuss the details of the plan. In a separate cable disputing some of Lodge's interpretative description of his statement to Don, Harkins stated that he had repulsed Don's suggestion that they meet again to discuss the coup plans. "I told Don that I would not discuss coups that were not my business though I had heard rumors of many. 42/ Taylor replied immediately, stating, "View here is that your actions in disengaging from the coup discussion were correct and that you should continue to avoid any involvement." 43/

A Conein's meeting with Don on the evening of the 24th, the latter indicated he had misunderstood General Harkins and had not seen Lodge. 44/ He said that the coup committee had refused to release any plans because of its anxiety about breaches of security. He did promise to turn over to Conein for Lodge's review detailed plans of the operation and the proposed successor government two days before the coup, which he reiterated would take place before November 2.

At this juncture, the nature of the dialogue between Lodge and the White House began to change. On October 25, Lodge sent McGeorge Bundy a long cable taking exception to Harkins' reservations about a coup and arguing for a policy of "not thwarting." 45/ No successor government could bungle the war as badly as Diem had, he argued, and, furthermore, for us to prevent a change of government would be "assuming an undue responsibility for keeping the incumbents in office." 46/ In his reply, Bundy expressed the White House anxiety about reaping the blame for an unsuccessful coup.

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. 47/

The discussion of these issues dominated the cable traffic between Lodge and the White House up to the day of the coup, with Washington concerned about detailed plans and prospects for success and Lodge stressing the irrevocability of our involvement.

There were no further contacts with the coup group until the day after the fruitless Lodge-Diem conversations. That Monday, October 28, Lodge and Diem were leaving Saigon for Dalat to dedicate the Vietnamese Atomic Energy Plant. At the airport before their departure, General Don daringly took Lodge aside and asked if Conein was authorized to speak for him. 48/ Lodge assured Don that he was. Don said that the coup must

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be thoroughly Vietnamese and that the U.S. must not interfere. Lodge agreed, adding that the U.S. wanted no satellites but would not thwart a coup. When Lodge asked about the timing of the coup, Don replied that the generals were not yet ready.

Later that evening Conein met Don by prearrangement at the latter's initiative. 49/ When Conein called Don's attention to Lodge's scheduled trip to Washington on October 31, indicating that it was important for him to review the coup plans before his departure, Don replied that the plans might not be available until four hours in advance, but urged that the Ambassador not change his plans as this might be a tip-off. Don said that nothing would happen in the next 48 hours, but the implication was that the coup would pre-empt Lodge's departure. When pressed for details of the planning, Don indicated that within the committee, Minh had charge of the military plans for the operation, Kim was doing the political planning, and he, Don, was the liaison with the Americans. They had surrounded General Dinh with coup supporters and he would be neutralized. Generals Tri and Khanh were both involved in the planning. General Khiem was being circumspect because he was under palace suspicion. Minor details of the plan and a list of units supporting the coup were also discussed.

Simultaneous separate contacts had confirmed that several important opposition civilians were in contact with the generals, including Phan Huy Quat, Bui Diem, and Tran Trung Dung, and that they expected to play a role in the post-coup government, which reportedly would be headed by Vice President Tho. In a cable dispatched that same day summarizing the situation, Lodge expressed some concern at the possibility of a premature coup by junior officers, but generally expressed confidence in the generals while regretting their reluctance for security reasons to provide details of their plans. 50/ He concluded in these words:

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 US will not be able significantly to influence course of events. 51/

Lodge's view was clear. We were committed and it was too late for second thoughts. Moreover, when the balloon went up he did not expect to have time to consult Washington. He expected, and probably preferred, to guide events himself.

In view of the deteriorating situation, instructions were given to Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, to have a task force stand off the Vietnamese

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coast for the possible evacuation of American dependents and civilians if events required. 52/ This was a re-enactment of a similar alert during the abortive August coup.

In Washington, McNamara and the JCS had become concerned about the differing views of Lodge and Harkins as to the correct U.S. course of action. 53/ More importantly, they were alarmed at the apparent breakdown of communication and coordination between the Ambassador and MACV. The cable traffic tended "to form a picture of a relationship which lacks the depth and continuity required by the complex circumstances in Saigon." 54/ Harkins' suggestions for improving their rapport were invited. After the NSC meeting on October 29, the White House was also concerned and instructed Lodge to show Harkins the relevant cables and be sure he was fully aware of the coup arrangements, since during Lodge's absence in Washington Harkins would have overall responsibility for the U.S. 55/

These two cables triggered a flurry of strong opposing reactions from Lodge and Harkins. Harkins, belatedly apprised of the recent Conein-Don contacts and of Lodge's evaluations and recommendations, took bitter exception to the Ambassador's conclusions in three separate cables on October 30. He particularly resented Lodge's independent, gloomy assessments of how the war was going, which were at direct odds with his own views, views which he had provided Lodge for inclusion in his weekly reports to Washington. 57/ As to U.S. policy toward a coup, he was irate at having been excluded by Lodge from information and consultation about the continuing contacts with the generals. 58/ The heart of the issue, however, was a disagreement about what was, in fact, U.S. policy toward a coup as defined by the Washington guidance cables. Harkins outlined the disagreement in a separate October 30 cable to Taylor:

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 October (see Appendix) and the additional thoughts, I repeat, thoughts expressed in CAS Washington 74228 dated 9 October (Appendix). I interpret CAP 63560 as our basic guidance and that CAS 74228 being additional thoughts did not change the basic guidance in that no initiative should now be taken to give any active covert encouragement to a coup. The Ambassador feels that 74228 does change 63560 and that a change of government is desired and feels as stated in CAS Saigon 1964 (Appendix) 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



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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 leader at this time.

\* \* \* \* \*

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. 58/

The first Washington message to Lodge on October 30 revealed that White House anxiety about the possible failure of a coup attempt, already evident on October 25 in CAP 63590 (see Appendix), had increased. 59/ The CIA's evaluation of the balance of forces cast doubt on whether the coup group could pull off a decisive action. 60/ With these concerns in mind, Washington could not accept Lodge's judgment "that no positive action by the USG can prevent a coup attempt..." 61/ The White House view was that:

...our attitude to coup group can still have decisive effects on its decisions. We believe that what we say to coup group can produce delay of coup and that betrayal of coup plans to Diem is not repeat not our only way of stopping coup. 62/

In a long reply (in which Harkins did not concur), Lodge was at pains to point out his powerlessness to prevent what was fundamentally a Vietnamese affair, short of revealing it to the palace.

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

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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.

\* \* \* \* \*

As regards your paragraph 10 (question of determination and force of character of coup leaders), 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. 63/

Whether Lodge seriously believed this or merely used it as an argumentative excuse for not entertaining the possibility of intervention to delay or stop an unviable attempt is not clear. His defense of the plotters and his support for their goal in this telegraphic dialogue with Washington, however, clearly show his emotional bias in favor of a coup. Elsewhere in the cable Lodge objected to the designation of Harkins as the Chief of Mission in the event of a coup during his absence.

The tone and content of these parallel messages from Harkins and Lodge only heightened White House anxiety and, no doubt, raised concern about the objectivity of these two principal U.S. observers of the critical Vietnamese situation. In an effort to clear the air, explicitly re-define and restate the policy guidance, and clarify the assignment of roles and responsibilities within the Mission, the White House sent still another cable to Saigon later on October 30. 64/ Taking pointed issue with Lodge's view, the message stated:

We do not accept as a basis for US 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 persuade coup leaders to stop or delay any operation which, in your best judgement, does not clearly give high prospect of success. We have never considered any betrayal of generals to Diem, and our 79109 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

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that only conviction of certain failure justifies intervention. We believe that your standard for intervention should be that stated above.

Therefore, if you should conclude that there is not clearly a high prospect of success, you should communicate this doubt to generals in a way calculated to persuade them to desist at least until chances are better. In such a communication you should use the weight of US 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 US 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. 65/

Lodge was also urgently requested to obtain more detailed information about the composition of the forces the coup leaders expected to have at their disposal so that we could better assess their prospects.

With regard to Lodge's absence, the instructions placed Truehart in charge unless a coup occurred, in which case Harkins would be Chief of Mission. The desirability of having Lodge on the scene in the event of a coup, however, was stressed and he was encouraged to delay his departure if he thought the coup was imminent. The following four-point standing instructions for U.S. posture in the event of a coup were also given:

a. US authorities will reject appeals for direct intervention from either side, and US-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, US 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, US 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, US 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.

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d. But once a coup under responsible leadership has begun, and within these restrictions, it is in the interest of the US Government that it should succeed. 66/

With respect to instruction d., however, no specific actions to support or guarantee the success of a coup were authorized. This message was the last guidance Lodge received from Washington before the coup began.

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V

THE COUP AND ITS AFTERMATH - NOVEMBER 1 - 23

1. The Coup

The atmosphere of Byzantine intrigue in Saigon in the fall of 1963 made it virtually impossible to keep track of all the plots against the regime. In one of his last messages to Washington before the coup, Lodge identified ten individual dissident groups in addition to the generals' group. 1/ These various plots were highly fluid in composition and quixotic in character, quickly appearing, disappearing and/or merging with other groups. There were, however, two groups that came into existence in the summer and retained their identity with some mutation until near the end. The first, chronologically, was variously identified as the Tuyen or Thao group after its successive leaders. It was conceived sometime in June by Dr. Tran Kim Tuyen, the Director of Political Studies (national intelligence) under Diem, and involved elements of the Ministries of Civic Action and Information and certain elements of the Army. When Dr. Tuyen was sent out of the country in September, the group was more or less merged with a separate group of middle level officers headed by Lt Colonel Pham Goc Thao. Several dates were established by this group for a coup during the summer and fall, but each time critical military units were temporarily transferred by either the palace or the JCS, under General Don, each of whom was somewhat aware of the group's plans and was interested in frustrating them. In the end, it concerted efforts with the generals as the only alternative with prospects of success.

The second group was, of course, composed of the senior generals of the Vietnamese Army. Plotting by this group also began in earnest in June. Initially, its leader was identified as General Khiem and later General Don, but the de facto leader throughout was, no doubt, General Minh who commanded by far the greatest respect and allegiance within the officer corps. The four principal members of the group were Generals Minh, Don, Khiem, and Kim, all of whom were stationed in Saigon without troop command, the latter three at JCS and General Minh as a palace military advisor. Generals Tri and Khanh, I and II Corps commanders respectively, were secondary members of the generals' group, but were also in touch with the Thao group. The abortive attempt by the generals to launch a coup in August has already been described in detail. Important lessons seem to have been learned by these men from that experience, for when they again began to set their plans and make arrangements it was with great attention to detail and with an explicit division of labor.

Among the plotters, General Minh had the overall direction of the coup activities, although the group acted in committee fashion with the members apparently voting at several points on particular actions. He

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was also responsible for the military operation of the coup itself. General Don was the liaison with the Americans and responsible for wooing General Dinh. General Kim handled planning for the post-coup government and the relations with the civilian groups that were expected to be called on to support the coup. 2/ General Khiem was to play a critical role at the end of October as the liaison man with the Thao coup group in working out the details of their support and integration into the actual execution of the coup.

As already noted, the fundamental problem of the plotters was their lack of troop command in the immediate Saigon area. The Ngo family's longstanding fear of military coups, as previously discussed, had been the main factor in all military command assignments and promotion policy. Nowhere was loyalty a more important prerequisite for command than in Saigon, the surrounding III Corps, and the nearby IV Corps, with its headquarters only 40 miles away down Highway 4. In addition to the sizable special forces units in Saigon under Colonel Tung and the various national police and paramilitary units that also took their orders directly from the palace, Diem had appointed the vain, ambitious, and supposedly loyal General Dinh as Commander of III Corps (whose 5th Division was stationed at nearby Bien Hoa) and the Saigon Military District. Furthermore, the IV Corps was commanded by General Cao, who had saved Diem during the 1960 coup by bringing his loyal 7th Division troops up from My Tho. It was on this formidable line-up of forces that the family had staked its survival; and not without reason, as the frustrated coup of August demonstrated.

Saigon, however, was not entirely without dissident elements. With the exception of their commanders, the Marine battalion, the airborne battalion, and the Air Force were all sympathetic to a coup. But the plotters knew that a favorable balance of forces could not be achieved or maintained without either the conversion or neutralization of Generals Dinh and Cao.

During the August pagoda raids, Dinh had been given overall command of the crackdown, although Tung had taken his instructions as always directly from Nhu in carrying out the attacks. 3/ Thereafter, Dinh, who was a notorious braggart, boasted that he had saved the country from the Buddhists, Communists, and "foreign adventurers." Carried away with himself, he held a news conference on August 27 in which he was harried and finally humiliated by antagonistic American journalists. The plotting generals decided that they would play on his vanity and egoism to win him over to their side. With his pride injured at the hands of the newsmen, Dinh was easy prey to Don's suggestion that Nhu had played him for a fool, but that he really was a national hero, and that the regime was indebted to him. Don suggested that Dinh go to Diem with a plan to increase military participation in the government, specifically that he, Dinh, be named Minister of Interior. Don rightly expected that Diem would be outraged at such a brazen request, and would reprimand Dinh, further

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wounding his pride and alienating him from the regime. Diem reacted as expected, and ordered Dinh to take a "vacation" in Dalat for a while. Don at this point began his long effort to woo Dinh to the plotters side against Diem. Dinh, however, lacked self-confidence and vacillated, although he does not appear to have played a double role by revealing the existence of the plot to the palace. While the elaborate stratagems for seducing Dinh were taking place, the plotters had carefully surrounded him with supporters of the coup, including his deputy, Colonel Co, whom they felt they could rely on to neutralize him if he showed signs of rallying to the family once the balloon was up. By the end of the third week in October, the plotters felt reasonably confident that the problem of Dinh had been resolved: he would, as an opportunist, rally to the coup if he felt it was going to succeed; if he did not, he would be eliminated.

At the same time, plans had been under way to neutralize General Cao, the IV Corps commander, since he would certainly betray the plotters to the palace if he got word of the plans, or bring his troops to Diem's aid if the coup started while he was still in control of them. To do this, Colonel Co, Dinh's deputy, was sent to the Delta to win the support of the subordinate commanders in IV Corps. In the ultimate plan, Co would be sent with JGS orders to take command of the 7th Division in My Tho on the day before the coup began; he would order all boats to the Saigon side of the Mekong River; and, thus, act as a blocking force to General Cao who, stranded in Can Tho on the far side of the Mekong, would then be arrested by dissident officers in his own command. Co apparently was successful in getting the support of the great majority of the subordinate officers, but one loyal officer heard of the plans and immediately tipped off Nhu.

Diem and Nhu called in Dinh and revealed what they had learned, attempting to force his hand. Dinh reacted with feigned shock and suggested that Co be executed immediately. This convinced Nhu that Dinh was not involved. They preferred to keep Co alive to get more information from him. Nhu then revealed his own elaborate scheme for a pseudo-coup that would pre-empt the plotters and squelch their plans. His two-part plan was to start with the transfer of Colonel Tung's special forces out of Saigon on maneuvers. The phony coup would then take place with Diem and Nhu escaping to their hideaway at Cap St Jacques. After several days of hooliganism including the murder of several prominent Vietnamese and some Americans, the loyal 5th Division under Dinh and the 7th under Cao would counterattack the city and Diem and Nhu would return as triumphant heroes, more secure than ever. Dinh was the key to Nhu's plan.

Dinh's role becomes confused at this point. He apparently was uncertain about the relative balance of forces and decided to cooperate with both sides until he could decide which he felt was going to gain the upper hand, although he was probably still leaning toward the palace.

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In any case, if he was trusted by the Nhus, he certainly was not by the generals because they confided in him none of their detailed plans for the operation, and Nhu's plan, in which he would have played the key role, never came to fruition. It was pre-empted by the real coup the generals had been plotting.

By the last week in October, timing had become critical. The Thao group apparently had intended to act on October 24, but were dissuaded by Don and Khiem who argued that they had too few forces to guarantee success. 4/ It was at this juncture that Khiem brought the Thao group into the plans and worked out joint arrangements with them for the execution of the coup. Shaplen says that the generals' coup was originally planned for November 4. This conflicts, however, with what Don had told Conein on October 24, namely that it would occur before November 2. 5/ By Shaplen's account, Dinh revealed the planned date of the coup to Nhu who instructed him to urge that it be advanced to November 1. 6/ Nhu still thought somehow he could carry off his plan by abandoning the phony coup, by letting the real one substitute for it in the hope that it would be thrown off balance by the advanced date, and by relying on Dinh's loyal troops as supplemented by Cao's to tip the scale in the family's favor once the chips were down. In allowing the generals to make their move, the principal rebels would all be compromised and Nhu could then act to crush all major dissidence. Whatever the reason, whether by Nhu's intrigue or by their own timetable, the generals set the coup for November 1.

While they had left a worried U.S. officialdom with only sketchy ideas of the planned operation, the generals had themselves devoted great attention to all details of their move. When the hour came for execution, the plan was implemented with hardly a hitch, and the fate of the regime was sealed in the first hours of the coup.

On October 29, the first preparatory action for a coup was taken. General Dinh ordered Colonel Tung to move his special forces out of the capital for maneuvers, but whether he was acting as the agent of the generals or the palace is still unclear. Simultaneously, the chief of intelligence, who had been a member of the Thao plot and was now participating in the generals' plan, passed phony intelligence of a VC build-up outside Saigon to Diem and Nhu to get them to divert loyal units that could have been used to thwart a coup.

The day of the coup itself began improbably with an official U.S. call on Diem. Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, had been visiting General Harkins to review the situation and prior to his departure at noon, he and Lodge paid a courtesy call on the President. Diem's monologue was little different from what he had said to McNamara and Taylor the month before. As they were leaving, however, he called Lodge aside and they talked privately for twenty minutes. Diem, in a tragically unwitting example of too little too late, indicated that he wanted to talk to Lodge



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sometime about what it was the U.S. wanted him to do. 7/ The atmosphere of this meeting must have been strained in the extreme in view of Lodge's awareness of the imminence of the coup. After the meeting, Felt went straight to the airport and held a press conference, with a nervous General Don at his side, before departing at noon unaware of the drama that was already unfolding.

While Lodge and Felt had been at the palace, coup units had already begun to deploy in and around Saigon. At the same time, nearly all the generals and top officers had been convened for a noon meeting at JGS headquarters at Tan Son Nhut. There the coup committee informed them that the coup had begun and asked for their support. Pledges of support were recorded on tape by all those present who supported the action. They were to be used later over the radio and would implicate the entire senior officer corps of the Army in the event the coup failed. In this way the plotters were able to enlist the support of several wavering officers. The only senior officers not present were Generals Dinh and Cao, who were not informed of the meeting to prevent their revealing the coup prematurely to the palace or taking counter action. Also not present was the South Vietnamese Chief of Naval Operations, who had been assassinated by a trigger-happy escort enroute. Several officers suspected of being loyal to Diem were taken into immediate custody at JGS, including Colonel Tung, and the commanders of the Air Force, the airborne brigade, the Marines, the Civil Guard, and the police force. A CAS officer, presumably Lt Colonel Conein, was also invited to come to JGS and was authorized to maintain telephone contact with the Embassy during the coup. He provided reliable reporting throughout the next two days.

At 1:45 p.m., Don called General Stilwell, Harkins' J-3, and informed him that all the generals were assembled at JGS and that the coup had begun. 8/ At the same time, coup forces were seizing the post office with its telecommunications facilities, the police headquarters, the radio stations, the airport, and the naval headquarters, and were deploying in positions to assault the special forces headquarters near Tan Son Nhut, the palace, and the barracks of the palace guard. Other units had been deployed in blocking positions to defend against any loyal counterattack from units outside Saigon. These actions were swift and met with little resistance. The units involved included the Marine and airborne units under the leadership of junior officers, the Air Force under junior officers, and units from the 5th Division under orders from Dinh, who had thrown in his lot when he became aware of the unanimity of the senior officers and their apparent likelihood of success. Later in the day, armor and troops from the 7th Division at My Tho, under the insurgent leadership of Colonel Co, arrived for the assault on the palace.

As is always the case in this kind of crisis, the quantity of cables quickly overwhelmed the communications system, and the incompleteness of the reports meant that no clear picture of what was happening could be pieced together until later. As in all such situations, the Embassy became an island linked to outside events only by tenuous reports from telephone contacts.

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In the early afternoon, Colonel Tung, who had been arrested on the morning of November 1, was forced to call his special forces and tell them to surrender to the coup forces. Not long thereafter, the adjacent special forces headquarters fell to the coup units after a brief skirmish. When this occurred, the palace was reduced for its defense to the palace guard, since the remainder of the special forces were outside the city and effectively cut off from it, and all other unit commanders had come under the command of officers involved in the coup. General Cao, the IV Corps commander, pledged his support to the coup in the late afternoon, although it is not clear whether this was opportunistic or whether he thought the coup was really Phase I of Nhu's plan. Not trusting him, however, the generals placed him under guard. At 4:30 p.m., the generals went on the radio to announce the coup and demand the resignation of Diem and Nhu. 9/ This was followed by a continuing broadcast of the pledges of support of the senior officers that had been recorded that morning. Meanwhile, Air Force transports were dropping prepared leaflets announcing the coup, and calling on the populace to support it.

At the beginning, Diem and Nhu were apparently fooled by the coup, or had completely miscalculated the extent of its support. At the first indications of coup actions, Nhu reportedly assured an alarmed official that it was all a part of a palace plan. 10/ When word reached the palace that all key points had fallen, Nhu tried to contact General Dinh. When he could not reach him, he realized that he had been outfoxed and that the coup was genuine. By this time, fighting was going on between the coup forces and the palace guard at the palace and the nearby guard barracks. When the generals called the two brothers and asked them to surrender, promising them safe conduct out of the country, Diem replied by asking them to come to the palace for "consultations," an obvious attempt to repeat the 1960 tactic of delaying the coup long enough for loyal troops to reach the city. The generals, however, were not bargaining -- they were demanding.

At 4:30 p.m., Diem called Lodge to ask where he stood and the following conversation ensued:

Diem: Some units have made a rebellion and I want to know what is the attitude of the US?

Lodge: I do not feel well enough informed to be able to tell you. I have heard the shooting, but am not acquainted with all the facts. Also it is 4:30 a.m. in Washington and the US 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.

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Lodge: You have certainly done your duty. As I told you only this morning, I admire your courage and your great contributions to your country. No one can take away from you the credit for all you have done. Now I am worried about your physical safety. I have a report that those in charge of the current activity offer you and your brother safe conduct out of the country if you resign. 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. 11/

There is no evidence available as to whether Washington issued further instructions with respect to the personal safety of Diem and Nhu at this time. 12/ The above conversation was the last that any American had with Diem. Lodge, as was his custom, retired that night at about 9:30 p.m. 13/

Shortly after Diem's call to Lodge, the generals called the palace again and put Colonel Tung on the phone. Tung told Nhu he had surrendered. The generals then demanded the immediate surrender of the brothers or they would put the palace under air and ground attack. Each general at JGS, in turn, was put on the phone to assure Diem of safe conduct if he would resign, but Nhu apparently dissuaded him. 14/ General Minh himself made a separate telephone call to Diem in a final attempt to get him to surrender, but Diem hung up. 15/ The two brothers now began frantically calling unit commanders throughout the country on their private communications system to get them to come to their aid. In most cases they could not get through, and when they did they were told to surrender by officers who now supported the coup. When they could get no help from the regular military, they made a vain effort to enlist the support of paramilitary units and their Republic Youth groups. Sometime in the early evening, probably by eight o'clock, they recognized the hopelessness of the situation and escaped from the palace, unbeknown to its defenders, through one of the secret underground exits connected to the sewer system. They were met by a Chinese friend who took them to his home in Cholon where they had previously set up a communications channel to the palace for just such an emergency. There they spent their last night.

In the face of the brothers' intransigent refusal to surrender and confident that they were now in control of the entire country and that

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their plans had succeeded, the generals began assembling forces and preparing for the siege of the palace. At about nine o'clock, they opened an artillery barrage of the palace and its defenders. Since the palace was being defended by some tanks, an infantry assault with tank support was required to capture it. This began about 3:30 a.m. on November 2, and lasted until about 6:30 a.m., when the palace fell, after Diem had issued a cease-fire order to the palace guard from his Cholon hideaway.

Throughout the night the brothers had remained in contact with both their loyal supporters at the palace, and periodically with the insurgents. The latter did not learn that the brothers had fled until the rebel forces under Colonel Thao invaded the palace. At 6:20 a.m., Diem called JCS and spoke personally with General Don, offering to surrender in exchange for a guarantee of safe conduct to the airport and departure from Vietnam. 16/ Minh agreed to these terms, but Diem did not reveal his whereabouts, still apparently unable to grasp the new realities. Colonel Thao learned of the location of the hideaway from a captured officer of the palace guard and received permission from Minh to go there and get the brothers. When he arrived at the house, he telephoned again to headquarters to report his location and was overheard by the brothers on another extension. They escaped to a nearby Catholic church, where once again Diem called General Don at 6:50 a.m. and surrendered unconditionally. 17/ He and Nhu were taken prisoner shortly thereafter by General Mai Huu Xuan, a long time enemy, who according to most accounts ordered or permitted their murder in the back of an armored personnel carrier enroute to JCS headquarters. 18/

The State Department reacted to news of the coup in terms of the recognition problem with respect to the new government. Rusk felt that a delay would be useful to the generals in not appearing to be U.S. agents or stooges and would assist us in our public stance of noncomplicity. 19/ He further discouraged any large delegation of the generals from calling on Lodge as if they were "reporting in." A subsequent message stressed the need to underscore publicly the fact that this was not so much a coup as an expression of national will, a fact revealed by the near unanimous support of important military and civilian leaders. 20/ It further stressed the importance of Vice President Tho to a quick return to constitutional government and the need, therefore, for the generals to include him in any interim regime. Lodge replied affirmatively to these views, indicating his opinion that we should encourage other friendly countries to recognize the new government first with the assurance that the U.S. would follow suit shortly. 21/ Further, we should show our friendly support for the regime and without fanfare resume payments in the commercial import program.

The news of the brutal and seemingly pointless murder of Diem and Nhu, however, was received in Washington with shock and dismay. 22/ President Kennedy was reportedly personally stunned at the news, particularly in view of the heavy U.S. involvement in encouraging the coup

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leaders. 23/ Apparently, we had put full confidence in the coup committee's offers of safe conduct to the brothers and, reluctant to intercede on behalf of Diem and Nhu for fear of appearing to offer support to them or of reneging on our pledges of non-interference to the generals, we had not appreciated the degree of hatred of the Ngo family among the generals, nor their fear that if the brothers survived the coup they would somehow, sometime stage a comeback. In their first meeting with Lodge after the coup, however, the generals denied that the assassination had been ordered, and promised to make public their offer of safe conduct to Diem if he would resign. 24/

While the callousness of the murders of Diem and Nhu, their previous repressiveness notwithstanding, horrified the world, the success of the coup and the deaths of the hated brothers were greeted with popular jubilation in South Vietnam. Spontaneous street demonstrations by students in a holiday mood ended in the burning of the offices of the Times of Vietnam and the destruction of a statue modeled after Mme. Nhu. The tension released set off celebrations rivaled only by the annual Tet New Year festivities. Americans were greeted and received with great enthusiasm, and Lodge was widely regarded as the hero of the whole train of events. Vietnamese were heard to remark that if an election for president were held Lodge would win by a landslide. 25/

Thus, the nine-year rule of Ngo Dinh Diem came to a sudden, bloody, and permanent end, and U.S. policy in Vietnam plunged into the unknown, our complicity in the coup only heightening our responsibilities and our commitment in this struggling, leaderless land. We could be certain only that whatever new leadership emerged would be fragile, untried, and untested.

## 2. Establishment of an Interim Regime

Even before the initiation of the coup, the coup committee through General Kim had been in touch with civilian political oppositionists and to some extent with members of Diem's government. Once the success of the coup was certain, negotiations with these civilians by the generals' committee began in earnest. On the night of November 1 and the following day, all ministers of Diem's government were told to submit their resignations and did so, some on U.S. advice. No reprisals were taken against them. Indeed, Vice President Tho entered into intensive negotiations with General Minh on November 2 on the composition of the interim government. He apparently understood the eagerness of the generals to have him head a new government to provide continuity, and he used this knowledge to bargain with them about the composition of the cabinet. He was not to be their pliant tool.

While these conferences were taking place, the coup committee, or "Revolutionary Committee" as it was now calling itself, distributed leaflets and press releases announcing the dissolution of the National

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Assembly and the abolition of the Diem-Nhu government based on the constitution of 1956, and proclaiming the support of the committee for such democratic principles as free elections, unhampered political opposition, freedom of press, freedom of religion, and an end to discrimination. 26/ They were at pains to explain that the purpose of the coup was to bolster the fight against the Communists which they pledge themselves to pursue with renewed vigor and determination.

On the afternoon of November 3, the second day after the coup, Generals Don and Kim called on Lodge at the Embassy, explaining that General Minh was tied up in conversations with Vice President Tho on the new government. 27/ The conversation was long and touched on many topics. It began with mutual expressions of satisfaction at the success of the coup, and continued with Lodge's assurance of forthcoming U.S. recognition for their new government. The generals explained that they had decided on a two-tiered government structure with a military committee presided over by General Minh overseeing a regular cabinet that would be mostly civilian with Tho as prime minister. Lodge promised to see to the immediate restoration of certain of the aid programs and the speedy resumption of the others when the government was in place. They then dealt with a host of immediate problems including the return of the Nhu children to their mother and the disposition of the rest of the Ngo family, press censorship, the release of Tri Quang from the Embassy, curfew, reprisals against former ministers, etc. The generals confirmed the psychological importance of the commodity import suspension to the success of their plans. Lodge was elated, both at the efficiency and success of the coup, and the seriousness and determination of the generals to deal with the pressing problems and get on with the war.

The following day, on instructions from Washington, Lodge, in company with Lt Colonel Conein, met with Generals Minh and Don. 28/ Washington had been anxious for Lodge to urgently convey to the generals the need to make a clarifying statement about the deaths of the brothers and to take steps to insure humane treatment of other members of the family. The generals were responsive to Lodge's urgings and promised to see that action was taken on the U.S. requests. Minh said that the composition of the new government would be announced shortly. In describing the meeting later, Lodge offered a prophetic description of Minh: "Minh seemed tired and somewhat frazzled; obviously a good, well-intentioned man. Will he be strong enough to get on top of things?" 29/ Lodge closed the cable by taking exception to State's excessive pre-occupation with the negative public relations problems of the coup and decrying its failure to note the brilliance with which the coup was planned and executed.

The promised announcement of the new government came on the morning of November 5. It was very much as General Kim had described it to Lodge on November 3. Minh was named President and Chief of the Military Committee; Tho was listed as Premier, Minister of Economy, and Minister

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of Finance; Don was named Minister of Defense; and General Dinh was named to the Ministry of Security (Interior). 30/ Only one other general was included in the cabinet of fifteen which was composed primarily of bureaucrats and civilians with no previous experience. Political figures, either opposed to Diem or not, were conspicuously absent from the cabinet, a fact which would impair the new government's securing the roots in popular support it would need in the long run. The announcement of the new cabinet was followed by the release of "Provisional Constitutional Act No. 1," signed by General Minh, formally suspending the 1956 constitution and outlining the structure and functions of the interim government. 31/ On November 6, Saigon radio announced the composition of the Executive Committee of the Military Revolutionary Council. Minh was Chairman, Don and Dinh were Deputy Chairmen, and nine other senior generals, including Kim, Khiem, "little" Minh, Chieu, and Thieu were members. Significantly, General Khanh was not.

On October 5, the new Foreign Minister had sent a note to the Embassy informing the Ambassador officially of the change of government, and expressing the hope that relations between the two countries would be continued and strengthened. 32/ State approved Lodge's proposed reply of recognition the following day, November 6, and, under the pressure of other governments and the press, announced its intention to recognize on November 7 in Washington. 33/ The note of recognition was delivered on November 8, when Lodge called on the new Foreign Minister, Pham Dang Lam. 34/ Lam, emphasizing his own insufficiencies for the job he had been given, asked for Lodge's advice which Lodge was apparently not reluctant to give on a variety of topics. The primary impression left was that the new government would be heavily dependent on U.S. advice and support, not only for the war effort, but also in the practical problems of running the country.

In the first three weeks of November 1963, three problems pre-occupied most Americans and Vietnamese in the new political and military situation created by the coup. The first of these was getting the new government started, developing the relations between the new Vietnamese officials and their American counterparts, and most importantly shaking down the power relationships within the new regime. 35/ The first two aspects of this problem would be self-resolving and were largely a matter of time. With respect to the latter, it was clear from the outset that General Minh was the dominant figure in the new government and was so regarded by nearly all the military men. Tho, however, had exhibited considerable independence during the negotiations over the cabinet, reflecting his confidence that the generals felt they needed him. The open question, then, was what degree of freedom of action the new cabinet under Tho would have, or alternatively, how deeply the military council intended to involve itself in running the country. This issue was not resolved in the public statements and communiques of the new regime and ambiguity on the subject was clearly reflected in the lack of decisiveness and vigor of the new ministers and in their general uncertainty as

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to their authority. While the exact reasons for not including any politicians in the cabinet are not known, it is reasonable to assume that neither Tho nor the military were anxious to see potential political rivals, with power deriving from popular support, in positions to challenge the authority of the new leaders. Whatever the case, it was the irresolution of the power relationship within the new government that was one of the factors contributing to the next round of coup-making in January 1964.

The second urgent problem of these first weeks in November was the rapidly deteriorating economic situation in Vietnam. The situation had been serious in September, and a large deficit for the 1964 budget had already been forecast. The suspension of the commercial import payments and selected PL 480 had aggravated the situation during September and October. Furthermore, all negotiations on the 1964 budget levels and U.S support had been suspended and were now seriously behind schedule. Aware of the urgency of the problem, State, on November 2, had asked for Lodge's recommendations on the resumption of aid and had urged him to identify the people responsible for economic planning in the new government so that negotiations could begin immediately. 36/ Concern was also expressed at the lack of expertise in this area among the generals and Lodge was advised to encourage them to make maximum use of economists in the previous government who were familiar with the problems. Lodge proposed in response that the government be asked to name a high level commission of economic experts to work with a similar group from the U.S. Mission. 37/ This suggestion had been agreed to in principle the previous day by Tho, through whose office all economic aid matters were to be channeled. 38/ Lodge also believed that our aid should be increased as an indication of our support for the new government. 39/ But beyond these preliminary discussions, no real progress was made on the economic problems before the Honolulu Conference on November 20.

The third problem that worried Americans was the heightened level of Viet Cong activity in the wake of the coup and the military dislocations caused by it. Related, but of even more importance, was the new information that came to light after the coup and in the atmosphere of free discussion that it generated showing that the military situation was far worse than we had believed. The overall statistical indicators had now begun to show deterioration dating back to the summer. The incidence of VC attacks was up over the first six months of 1963, the weapons loss ratio had worsened and the rate of VC defections was 'way down. 40/ In the immediate wake of the coup, VC activity had jumped dramatically as MACV had feared it would and there was great concern to return units participating in the coup to the field quickly to forestall any major Communist offensive. 41/ Cause for more fundamental concern, however, were the first rumors and indications that under Diem there had been regular and substantial falsification in the military reporting system and in reporting on the strategic hamlets that had badly distorted the real military situation in Vietnam to make it appear less serious than it was.



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This, it turned out, was the main reason for the previous discrepancies in MACV and U.S. mission evaluations of the war. In the first flush of self-satisfaction after the coup, Lodge had predicted that the change of regime would shorten the war because of the improved morale of the ARVN troops. 42/ But as time wore on, the accumulating evidence of the gravity of the military situation displaced these sanguine prognoses.

The only comforting note in the intelligence was the apparent discomfiture of the National Liberation Front. Throughout the summer and fall, the NLF had seemingly been unable to capitalize on the Buddhist or student struggle movements. In fact, its principal response to the Diem-Buddhist clash had been increasingly vituperative attacks on the U.S. Not until November 7th did the NLF issue a post-Diem policy statement, consisting of a list of "eight demands": 43/

- (1) Destroy all strategic hamlets...and other disguised camps.
- (2) Release all political detainees....
- (3) Promulgate without delay democratic freedom....
- (4) Root out all vestiges of the fascist and militarist dictatorial regime.
- (5) Stop all persecution and repression and raiding operations.
- (6) Dissolve all nepotist organizations....
- (7) Immediately stop forcible conscription....
- (8) Cancel all kinds of unjustified taxes.

The Duong Van Minh government could claim that it was in the process of meeting all of these "demands" except one -- halting the draft -- so that the NLF was effectively pre-empted. On November 17, the NLF Central Committee issued another series of demands:

- (1) Eliminate the vestiges of the Diem regime.
- (2) Establish democratic freedom.
- (3) Eliminate American influence.
- (4) Make social and economic reforms.
- (5) Halt the fighting.
- (6) Establish a coalition government.

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The demands were accompanied by a statement affirming the reunification of Vietnam as a goal of the NLF, the first such statement in over two years. Douglas Pike's analysis was unable to resolve the reasons for the inaction of the NLF throughout the crisis:

Had the NLF leadership wished to do so, it could have used its impressive struggle machine to launch in the name of the Buddha a nation-wide struggle movement that conceivably could have ended with its long-pursued General Uprising... Knowledgeable Vietnamese attributed its refusal to act to an unwillingness to involve itself in an alien struggle movement. The NLF and the communists, ran the argument, avoid activities over which they do not exercise total control.... The Buddhist leadership made it clear it did not seek NLF help since it wished at all costs to avoid the Communist stigma. Another popular explanation for the NLF's "sit-tight" policy during the Buddhist troubles was that the NLF was going to allow the bourgeois revolutionary forces to succeed in toppling Diem, after which it would capture the Revolution as the Kerensky Government was captured in the Russian Revolution. No such effort, however, was made by the NLF. A slanderous but widely bandied explanation among Vietnamese at the time was that the NLF did not want Diem removed, that he and his brothers and sister-in-law were far more valuable to the NLF in office than out. In truth, the NLF posture during this period remains something of a mystery. 44/

3. The Honolulu Conference and NSAM 273

Having postponed his planned October 31 visit to Washington because of the imminence of the coup, Lodge apparently suggested, in response to a State query, that it be rescheduled for November 10. Rusk proposed a further postponement to insure time for Lodge to establish working relations with the new government and to take advantage of his own planned trip to Tokyo later in the month. 44/ Accordingly, a meeting with Rusk, Bundy, Bell, McNamara, and Taylor in Honolulu was scheduled on November 20 for the entire country team. Lodge was invited to proceed on to Washington after the meeting if he felt he needed to talk with the President.

In preparation for the conference, State dispatched a long series of specific questions to Lodge on possible methods of broadening the political base of support of the new government and increasing the effectiveness of the war effort. 46/ This was additional to the comprehensive review of the situation, including an evaluation of progress on the McNamara-Taylor recommendations, that the military was expected to provide

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and the in-depth assessment of the new regime and its prospects by the country team. 47/ Lodge replied even before arriving at the conference that the proposed discussions would require detailed information about the functioning of the new rulers which it was far too early to obtain. 48/

In a broad overview of the new political situation in Vietnam at the plenary session in Honolulu, Lodge voiced his optimism about the actions taken thus far by the new government to consolidate its popular support. 49/ In particular, he noted the efforts to eliminate forced labor in the strategic hamlets, to curtail arbitrary arrests, to deal with extortion and corruption, to enlist the support of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects, and to consolidate and strengthen the strategic hamlet program. But, he left no doubt that the new leadership was inexperienced and fragile. For this reason, he urged the conferees not to press too much on the government too soon, either in the way of military and economic programs, or steps to democratize and constitutionalize the country. His second major point was the psychological and political, as well as economic, need for U.S. aid to the new government in at least the amount of our aid to Diem, and preferably more. He recognized the domestic political problems in the U.S. with Congress, but he argued that anything less would be a severe blow to the new rulers who were still getting their bearings. USOM Director Brent supported these latter views, but registered his concern about the naiveté of the new leaders in the face of an extremely grave economic situation. 50/ In response to a direct question from Rusk as to whether an increase in dollars would shorten the war, Lodge demurred somewhat and replied that what was required was greater motivation. 51/ McNamara immediately disagreed, saying that his understanding of the piaster deficit problem was that it was endangering all the programs, and that both AID and MAP were in need of increased funding. Concurring in this view, AID Administrator Bell agreed to review the entire AID program.

General Harkins' assessment of the military situation took note of the upsurge of Viet Cong activity in the week following the coup, but in general remained optimistic, although more guardedly than in the past. 52/ The sharp increase in VC attacks after the coup seemed to have been haphazard, and not part of a well coordinated country-wide response to the uncertain political situation. And in the week just ended, activity had returned to more normal levels. Moreover, he did not show concern about the seeming long term deterioration in the statistical indicators. While he was favorably impressed with the determination of the new leaders to prosecute the war and make needed changes, he was worried about the sweeping replacement of division and corps commanders and province chiefs. The discontinuities and disruptions created by wholesale replacement of province chiefs could have a serious negative effect on the whole counter-insurgency program. On the positive side, he noted the strengthened chain of command under General Don as both Defense Minister and Chief of Staff. McNamara pointedly questioned both Harkins and the other military

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briefers about conditions in the Delta and seemed skeptical of the official optimism, although he was equally disinclined to accept undocumented negative judgments.

The conference ended inconclusively with respect to the military problem. It did, however, underscore U.S. support for the new regime and focus U.S. official concern on the urgency and gravity of the economic problem confronting the new government. An uninformative press release after the conference took note of U.S. support for the new government in facing the difficult political and economic problems in South Vietnam, and pointedly reiterated the plan to withdraw 1,000 U.S. troops by the end of the year with 300 to leave on December 3. 53/

Lodge flew to Washington the following day and conferred with President Johnson. Based on that meeting and the report of the discussions at Honolulu, a National Security Action Memorandum was drafted to give guidance and direction to our efforts to improve the conduct of the war under the new South Vietnamese leadership. 54/ It described the purpose of the American involvement in Vietnam as, "to assist the people and Government of that country to win their contest against the externally directed and supported Communist conspiracy." 55/ It defined contribution to that purpose as the test of all U.S. actions in Vietnam. It reiterated the objectives of withdrawing 1,000 U.S. troops by the end of 1963 and ending the insurgency in I, II, and III Corps by the end of 1964, and in the Delta by the end of 1965. U.S. support for the new regime was confirmed and all U.S. efforts were directed to assist it to consolidate itself and expand its popular support. In view of the series of press stories during November about the disagreements between Harkins and Lodge, the President requested "full unity of support for established US policy" both in Saigon and in Washington. 56/ NSAM 273 directed the concentration of U.S. and Vietnamese military, political, economic and social efforts to improve the counterinsurgency campaign in the Mekong Delta. It further directed that economic and military aid to the new regime should be maintained at the same levels as during Diem's rule. And in conclusion, plans were requested for clandestine operations by the GVN against the North and also for operations up to 50 kilometers into Laos; and, as a justification for such measures, State was directed to develop a strong, documented case "to demonstrate to the world the degree to which the Viet Cong is controlled, sustained and supplied from Hanoi, through Laos and other channels." 57/

As a policy document, NSAM 273 was to be extremely short lived. In the jargon of the bureaucracy, it was simply overtaken by events. The gravity of the military situation in South Vietnam was only hinted at in NSAM 273 and in the discussions in Honolulu. Its full dimensions would rapidly come to light in the remaining weeks of 1963 and force high level reappraisals by year's end. But probably more important, the deterioration of the Vietnamese position in the countryside and the rapid

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collapse of the strategic hamlet program were to confront the fragile new political structure in South Vietnam with difficulties it could not surmount and to set off rivalries that would fulfill all the dire predictions of political instability made by men as diverse as John Mecklin and Fritz Nolting before Diem's fall.



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I

IV. B. 5.

FOOTNOTES

1. Robert Shaplen, The Lost Revolution (New York: Harper & Rowe: 1966) p. 189
2. Ibid., p. 153
3. NIE 53-63 "Prospects in South Vietnam," April 17, 1963.
4. Briefing paper, "Highlights of the Current Situation" for the Secretary of Defense, Honolulu Conference, May 6, 1963.
5. Sir R. G. K. Thompson, "The Situation in South Vietnam, March 1963," March 11, 1963.
6. NIE 53-63, op. cit.
7. CIA Current Intelligence Memorandum OCI 0521/63, April 9, 1963
8. Saigon mag 888, April 7, 1963 (S).
9. CIA Memorandum OCI 0521/63, op. cit.

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II

FOOTNOTES

1. CIA Intelligence Memorandum No. 0811/66, 4 May 1966. This estimate is probably high. GVN refugee officials estimated about 800,000 Catholics among their charges; Cf. Bui Van Luong in Richard W. Lindholm, ed., Viet-Nam (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University Press, 1959.)
2. Saigon Airgram A-781, June 10, 1963 (C)
3. SNIE 53-2-63, 10 July 1963
4. CIA Current Intelligence Memorandum, OCI No. 2339/63, 14 Aug 63
5. Ibid.
6. Saigon msg 1038, May 18, 1963 (C)
7. Saigon msg 1050, May 22, 1963 (S)
8. State msg 1159, May 29, 1963 (S)
9. State msg 1171, June 3, 1963 (S)
10. Saigon msg 1100, June 4, 1963 (S)
11. Saigon msg 1136, June 9, 1963 (S)
12. State msg 1207, June 11, 1963 (S)
13. Saigon msg 1168, June 12, 1963 (S)
14. Saigon msg 85, July 15, 1963 (S)
15. State msg 160, August 5, 1963 (S), and State msg 178, August 8, 1963 (S)
16. Saigon msg 226, August 14, 1963 (S)
17. Saigon msg 229, August 14, 1963, (C)
18. New York Herald Tribune, August 15, 1963.
19. State msg 204, August 15, 1963.
20. SNIE 53-2-63, July 10, 1963.



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21. Charles von Luttechau, The US Army Role in the Conflict in Vietnam, Office of the Chief of Military History (TS), Chapter IX, pp. 9-21.
22. SecDef Statement to Press, July 19, 1963.
23. SNIE 53-2-63, July 10, 1963.
24. See David Halberstam, The Making of a Quagmire, (New York: Random House, 1964), pp. 136-193.
25. David Halberstam, "Vietnamese Reds Gain in Key Area," New York Times, August 15, 1963.
26. Major General V. H. Krulak, JCS, SACSA, Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, August 16, 1963 (S).
27. Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation for the Record (Participants: the President, Ball, Harriman, McGeorge Bundy, Hilsman and Forrestal), July 4, 1963 (TS EYES ONLY). (attached in appendix).
28. Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation, July 5, 1963 (S). (Attached in appendix).
29. Ibid.

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III

FOOTNOTES

1. CIA Information Report, TDCS DB-3/656,252, August 24, 1963 (C)
2. Text reported in Saigon msg 280, August 21, 1963 (U); other accounts credit Nhu with the martial law idea as well.
3. As reported by General Le Van Kim in an interview with Rufus Phillips (USOM) August 23, 1963, Saigon msg 320, Lodge to State, August 24, 1963 (TS).
4. David Halberstam, The Making of A Quagmire, op.cit., pp. 231-232.
5. CIA Information Report, op.cit.
6. Halberstam, op.cit., p. 236.
7. John Mecklin, Mission in Torment (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 181.
8. State msg 226, August 21, 1963 (LOU).
9. Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, S-18, 548/P-3, Subject: (S) Martial Law in South Viet-Nam, August 21, 1963.
10. Roger Hilsman, To Move a Nation, (New York: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 481-3.
11. State msg 235, Hilsman to Lodge (TS), August 22, 1963.
12. Saigon msg 314, Lodge to State, August 23, 1963 (TS).
13. CIA Information Report, op.cit.
14. Saigon msg 320, Lodge to State, August 24, 1963 (TS).
15. Saigon msg 316, Lodge to Hilsman, August 24, 1963 (TS), reports a conversation between Kattenburg (VN/WG), who had accompanied Lodge from Honolulu, and Vo Van Hai, Diem's chef de cabinet; Saigon msg 324, Lodge to State, August 24, 1963 (TS), reports Phillips' conversation with Secretary of State Nguyen Dinh Thuan.
16. Saigon msg 329, Lodge to Hilsman, August 24, 1963 (S).
17. Ibid.
18. The intelligence reports do not reflect an accurate picture of what

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actually transpired in the raids and martial law decree until August 26. See Current Intelligence Memorandum OCI No. 2343/63, August 26, 1963 (S); and Director, DIA, Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, August 26, 1963 (S).

19. Thuan statement as reported in Saigon msg 324, op. cit.; Hilsman, To Move a Nation, op. cit., p. 485.
20. Hilsman, ibid.
21. State msg 243, State to Lodge, August 24, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
22. Ibid.
23. Arthur Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965), p. 904; for a more positive view of these events, see Hilsman, op. cit., pp. 483-9.
24. Michael V. Forrestal, Memorandum for the President, August 25, 1963 (TS EYES ONLY); direct quote from unavailable, unnumbered Saigon cable.
25. Hilsman, op. cit., p. 488.
26. CAS Saigon msg 0292, August 25, 1963 (TS).
27. Hilsman, op. cit., pp. 488-9.
28. Ibid.
29. CAS Saigon msg 0329, Lodge to Harriman, August 26, 1963 (TS).
30. See Mecklin, op. cit., pp. 183-4 and 197-8.
31. See Current Intelligence Memoranda, OCI No. 2339/63, August 14, 1963, and OCI No. 2341/63, August 21, 1963 (S).
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. CIA to State (no number), August 26, 1963 (TS).
36. CAS Saigon 0346, CIA to State, August 27, 1963 (TS).
37. CAS Saigon 0357, CIA to State, August 27, 1963 (S).

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38. Hilsman, op.cit., pp. 490-91. For a similar account see Schlesinger, op.cit., p. 904. The virtual lack of official records for the NSC meetings in August, September, and October 1963 requires a major caveat on the part of the author with respect to the analysis of Washington policy deliberations for that period. Of necessity, the author has turned to the public sources (which are not without bias) in an effort to piece together the story of how decisions were reached; primarily Roger Hilsman, To Move a Nation, op.cit.; Arthur Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, op.cit.; and John Mecklin, Mission in Torment, op.cit.
39. State msg 256, State to Lodge, August 27, 1963 (TS).
40. Saigon msg 364, Lodge to State, August 28, 1963 (TS).
41. MACV msg 1544, Harkins to Taylor and Felt (TS, EYES ONLY), August 28, 1963, emphasis added.
42. MACV msg 1557, Harkins to Taylor, August 28, 1963 (TS).
43. CAS Saigon msg 0363, August 28, 1963 (TS).
44. Ibid.
45. Hilsman, op.cit., pp. 492-3.
46. Ibid.
47. State msg 269, President to Lodge, August 28, 1963 (TS); and JCS msg 3385, Taylor to Harkins, August 29, 1963 (TS).
48. State msg 268, State to Lodge, August 28, 1963 (TS).
49. CAS Saigon msg 0406, August 29, 1963 (TS).
50. CAS Saigon msg 0437, August 29, 1963 (TS).
51. Saigon msg 375, Lodge to State, August 29, 1963 (TS).
52. MACV msg 1566, Harkins to Taylor, August 29, 1963 (TS).
53. Hilsman, op.cit., p. 493.
54. State msg 279, Rusk to Lodge, August 29, 1963 (TS).
55. State msg 272, State to Lodge and Harkins, August 29, 1963 (TS).
56. Saigon msg 383, Lodge to State, August 30, 1963 (TS).
57. CAS Saigon msg 0483, CIA to State, August 30, 1963 (TS).
58. MACV msg 1583, Harkins to Taylor, August 31, 1963 (TS).

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59. CAS Saigon msg 0499, CIA to State, August 31, 1963 (S); and Saigon msg 391, Lodge to State, August 31, 1963 (TS).
60. Saigon msg 391, op.cit.
61. Ibid.
62. Major General V. C. Krulak, Memorandum for the Record, Vietnam Meeting at the State Department, August 31, 1963 (TS SENSITIVE) (attached in appendix).
63. Ibid.
64. Hilsman, op.cit., p. 496.
65. Krulak, Memorandum for the Record, op.cit.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. "Transcript of broadcast with Walter Cronkite inaugurating a CBS Television news program, September 2, 1963," in Public Papers of the Presidents: John F. Kennedy, (Washington: GPO, 1964), vol. III, pp. 651-2, emphasis added (attached in appendix).
70. Ibid.
71. Hilsman, op.cit.
72. Saigon msg 346, Lodge to State, August 27, 1963 (TS).
73. Saigon msg 403, Lodge to State, September 2, 1963 (TS).
74. Saigon msg 388, Lodge to State, August 30, 1963 (TS); Saigon msg 391, Lodge to State, August 31, 1963 (TS).
75. Saigon msg 434, Lodge to State, September 7, 1963 (TS).
76. Saigon msg 446, Lodge to State, September 9, 1963 (TS).
77. Hilsman, op.cit., p. 500-501.
78. State msg 348, State to Lodge, September 6, 1963 (TS).
79. Hilsman, op.cit., p. 501.

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80. Hilsman, op. cit., pp. 501-502.
81. State msg 353, State to Lodge, September 7, 1963 (TS).
82. Major General V. C. Krulak, "Visit to Vietnam, 7-10 September 1963" (TS), pp. 1-2.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid., pp. 2-3.
85. Schlesinger, op.cit., p. 905; Hilsman, op.cit., pp. 502-505; and Mecklin, op.cit., p. 208 give parallel accounts of this meeting.
86. Schlesinger, ibid.
87. Mecklin, op.cit., pp. 210-211.
88. Hilsman, op.cit., pp. 504-505.
89. State msg 313, Joint State/AID msg to Lodge, September 3, 1963.
90. Hilsman, op.cit., p. 505.
91. Mecklin, op.cit., p. 210.
92. Committee on Foreign Relations, U. S. Senate, Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam (3rd ed.) (Washington: GPO, July 1967), p. 13.
93. "Transcript of broadcast on NBC's 'Huntley-Brinkley Report', September 9, 1963", Public Papers of the Presidents, op.cit., p. 659.
94. Saigon msg 478, Lodge to State, September 11, 1963 (TS). Saigon msg 483, Lodge and Brent to State, on the same day, took the opposite view and requested permission to approve pending aid programs. This cable probably reflects Brent's view, in which Lodge concurred to avoid revealing the content of his earlier cable.
95. Saigon msgs 469-477, Lodge to State, September 12, 1963 (TS).
96. State msg 391, State to Lodge, September 12, 1963 (TS).
97. State msg 411, State to Lodge, September 14, 1963 (TS).
98. MACV msg 1649, Harkins to Taylor, September 9, 1963 (TS); MACV msg 1675, Harkins to Taylor, September 12, 1963 (TS); and John A. McCone, Director CIA, Memorandum, September 13, 1963 (TS).

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99. MACV msg 7536, Harkins to Taylor, September 18, 1963.
100. "Summary of Mr. Sheldon's Analysis of Vietnam Situation," September 11, 1963 (S EYES ONLY), in SecDef Briefing Book.
101. Saigon msg 530, Lodge to State, September 16, 1963 (C).
102. Rober Hilsman, Memorandum to the Secretary of State, Subject: Viet-Nam, September 16, 1963 (TS-EYES ONLY).
103. CAP msg 63516, White House to Lodge, September 17, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
104. Ibid.
105. Saigon msg 544, Lodge to State for President only, September 19, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix); and Saigon msg 545, to the President from Lodge, September 19, 1963 (TS).
106. CAP msg 63516, op.cit.
107. Saigon msg 536, Lodge to President, September 18, 1963 (TS).
108. State msg 431, President to Lodge, September 18, 1963 (TS); and Saigon msg 540, Lodge to President, September 18, 1963 (TS).
109. Press release, September 21, 1963, 12:05 p.m.
110. President John F. Kennedy, Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, September 21, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
111. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, Remarks to the Press on Departure for Vietnam, Andrews AFB, Md., September 23, 1963.
112. Schlesinger, op.cit., pp. 907-908; Hilsman, op.cit., pp. 502-508.
113. Commander USMACV, "Transcript of Opening Conference with the Secretary of Defense, Ambassador and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the Status of the US Effort in Vietnam", 25 September 1963 (TS).
114. State msg 476, EYES ONLY for Ambassador Lodge and Secretary McNamara, September 24, 1963 (TS); and Saigon msg 593, EYES ONLY for President, September 25, 1963 (TS).
115. Saigon msg 612, Lodge to State, September 29, 1963 (TS).
116. MACV msg JOL 7847 from Harkins to Taylor, October 1, 1963 (S).
117. Saigon msg 613, Lodge to State, September 13, 1963 (TS).

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118. Commander USMACV, "Transcript . . .," op.cit., pp. 7A-8A.
119. Saigon msg 602, Lodge to State, EYES ONLY, September 27, 1963 (TS).
120. Saigon msg 608, Lodge to State, EYES ONLY, September 27, 1963 (TS); Joseph Brent, Director USOM, Memorandum for the Ambassador, September 30, 1963 (S-LIMDIS).
121. USAID Briefing Paper, "Listing of Possible Economic Aid Suspensions with Estimated Impacts," no date (S-LIMDIS).
122. Secretary of Defense, Memorandum for the President, Subject: Report of the McNamara-Taylor Mission to South Vietnam, 2 October 1963 (S), p.2 (conclusions and recommendations attached in appendix).
123. Ibid.
124. Ibid., p.5.
125. Ibid.
126. The 1,000 man withdrawal plan is dealt with in detail in another Task Force paper, "Phased Withdrawal of US Forces 1962-1964".
127. Secretary of Defense, memorandum for the President, op.cit.
128. National Security Council Action, No. 2472, October 2, 1963 (TS); and "White House Statement following the Return of a Special Mission to Vietnam," October 2, 1963, in Public Papers of the Presidents: John F. Kennedy - 1963, op.cit., pp. 757-760 (both attached in appendix).
129. NSAM, No. 263, October 11, 1963 (TS EYES ONLY), emphasis added (attached in appendix).
130. State msg 534, October 5, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
131. Ibid.

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IV

FOOTNOTES

1. CAS msg FVS 9750, to State from Saigon, October 9, 1967 (S); CAS msg FVS 9753, to State from Saigon, October 9, 1967 (S); and Saigon msg 676, Lodge to State, October 10, 1967 (TS).
2. Saigon msg 637, to State from Lodge, October 5, 1963 (S).
3. Saigon msg 654, to State from Lodge, October 7, 1963 (TS).
4. Saigon msg 642, to State from Lodge, October 6, 1963 (TS EYES ONLY).
5. Ibid.
6. Saigon msg 652, to State from Lodge, October 7, 1963 (TS EYES ONLY).
7. Saigon msg 647, to State from Lodge, October 7, 1963 (TS).
8. State msg 576, to Lodge from the President, October 14, 1963 (TS EYES ONLY).
9. Saigon msg 712, October 16, 1963 (TS).
10. Saigon msg 715, October 16, 1963 (C); and Saigon msg 732, October 18, 1963 (TS).
11. CIA Current Intelligence Memorandum, OCI 2370/63, October 19, 1963 (S).
12. Saigon msg 731, October 18, 1963 (S).
13. MACV msg JOI 8250, for General Taylor and Admiral Felt from Harkins, October 17, 1963 (TS).
14. MACV msg 2006, October 26, 1963 (TS).
15. CIA Current Intelligence Memorandum OCI 2370/63, op.cit.
16. Department of State, INR Research Memorandum RFE90, October 22, 1963 (S).
17. Hilsman, op.cit., p. 515.
18. Washington Daily News, October 2, 1963; also Halberstam story, New York Times, October 4, 1963.
19. State msg 529, October 4, 1963 (S).
20. Saigon msg 768, to Secretary of State, October 23, 1963 (TS).

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21. State msg 647, October 25, 1963 (TS).
22. Saigon msg 805, October 29, 1963 (?).
23. Ibid.
24. Saigon msg 804, October 28, 1963 (S).
25. Saigon msg 816, October 30, 1963 (S).
26. State msg 576, to Lodge from the President, October 14, 1963 (TS EYES ONLY); and CAS Saigon msg 11428, Lodge to the President, October 15, 1963 (TS).
27. Saigon msg 11428, op.cit.
28. CAS Saigon msg 1385, October 3, 1963 (S).
29. CAS Saigon msg 1445, to State from Lodge, October 5, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
30. CAS Saigon msg 34026, to State from Lodge, October 5, 1963 (TS EYES ONLY FOR SECRETARY RUSK).
31. Ibid.
32. CAP msg 63560 via CAS channel, October 5, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
33. CAP msg 74228, October 6, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
34. Shaplen, op.cit., pp. 203-4.
35. USARMA Saigon msg 199, from Jones, USARMA, Saigon, to McNamara, October 21, 1963 (TS).
36. CAS Saigon msg 1896, October 23, 1963 (TS).
37. CAS Saigon 1906, to State from Lodge, October 23, 1963 (TS).
38. MACV msg 1991, Harkins to Taylor, October 24, 1963 (TS).
39. Ibid.
40. CAS msg 77878, to Lodge, October 24, 1963 (TS); and CAS msg 78141, McCone to Saigon, October 24, 1963 (TS).
41. CAS Saigon msg 1925, October 24, 1963 (TS).
42. MACV msg 1993, Harkins to Taylor, 241055Z October 1963 (TS).
43. JCS msg 4137-63, 242246 October 1963 (TS).

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44. CAS Saigon msg 47370, October 25, 1963 (TS).
45. CAS Saigon msg 1964, Lodge to McGeorge Bundy, October 25, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
46. Ibid.
47. CAP msg 63590, McGeorge Bundy to Lodge, October 25, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
48. CAS Saigon msg 2003, Lodge to State, October 28, 1963 (TS).
49. CAS Saigon msg 2023, Lodge to State, October 29, 1963 (TS).
50. CAS Saigon 2040, Lodge to State, October 29, 1963 (TS).
51. Ibid.
52. JCS msg 3301, Taylor to Felt, October 29, 1963 (TS).
53. JCS msg 4188-63, Taylor to Harkins, October 29, 1963 (TS EYES ONLY).
54. Ibid.
55. CAS Washington msg 79109, McGeorge Bundy to Lodge, October 30, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
56. MACV msg 2033, Harkins to Taylor, October 30, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
57. MACV msg 2034, Harkins to Taylor, October 30, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
58. MACV msg 2028, Harkins to Taylor, October 30, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
59. CAS Washington msg 79109, op.cit.
60. CAS Washington msg 79126, CIA to White House, October 30, 1963 (TS).
61. CAS Saigon msg 2040, op.cit.
62. CAS Washington msg 79109, op.cit.
63. CAS Saigon msg 2063, Lodge to State, October 30, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
64. CAS Washington msg 79407, Bundy to Lodge, October 30, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.

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FOOTNOTES

1. CAS Saigon msg 2114, Lodge to State, October 31, 1963 (TS).
2. CAS Saigon 2023, op.cit.
3. It is extremely difficult to piece together from classified sources the story of the complex intrigues that culminated in the coup itself. In view of his extensive contacts among U.S. and Vietnamese officials in Saigon, as well as among the generals, the most plausible and detailed account of the plotting and counter-plotting, and the one on which this narrative has most heavily relied, is that of Robert Shaplen in The Lost Revolution, op.cit., pp. 201-212.
4. Shaplen, op.cit., p. 205.
5. CAS Saigon msg 1925, op.cit.
6. Shaplen, op.cit., p. 206.
7. Saigon msg 854, Lodge to State, November 1, 1963 (S).
8. CIA (MACV) CRITIC 8, November 1, 1963 (S).
9. Saigon msg 859, Lodge to State, November 1, 1963 (U).
10. Shaplen, op.cit., p. 208.
11. Saigon msg 860, Lodge to State, November 1, 1963 (?).
12. Whatever, if anything, transpired between Washington and AmEmb Saigon on November 1, can only be ascertained through interviews.
13. Mecklin, op.cit., pp. 262-3.
14. Saigon msg 913, Lodge to State, November 4, 1963 (S).
15. Shaplen, op.cit., p. 208.
16. CIA Saigon CRITIC msg 18 to Director NSA, November 2, 1963 (S).
17. CIA Saigon CRITIC msg 19 to Director NSA, November 2, 1963 (S).
18. See Saigon msg 888, Lodge to State, November 2, 1963, 8:45 a.m. (S), for the conflicting versions of the murder.
19. State msg 673, Rusk to Lodge, November 1, 1963 (S).
20. State msg 683, November 1, 1963, 8:47 p.m. (S EYES ONLY).
21. Saigon msg 875, November 1, 1963, 11:38 p.m. (S).

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22. State msg 688, November 2, 1963 (S).
23. Schlesinger, op.cit., p. 909.
24. Saigon msg 900, Lodge to State, November 3, 1963 (S).
25. Hilsman, op.cit., p. 521.
26. Saigon msgs 885 and 886, Lodge to State, November 2, 1963 (U).
27. Saigon msg 900, Lodge to State, November 3, 1963 (S).
28. State msg 704, State to Lodge, November 3, 1963 (S); and Saigon msg 917, Lodge to State, November 4, 1963 (S).
29. Saigon msg 917, op.cit.
30. Saigon msg 927, Lodge to State, November 5, 1963 (U).
31. Saigon msg 929, Lodge to State, November 5, 1963 (U).
32. Saigon msg 944, Lodge to State, November 6, 1963 (U).
33. State msg 742, State to Lodge, November 6, 1963 (S); State msg 749, State to Lodge, November 7, 1963 (C).
34. Saigon msg 976, Lodge to State, November 8, 1963 (S).
35. For a general assessment of the political situation, see CIA Saigon msg 2428, November 14, 1963 (S EYES ONLY).
36. State msg 701, State to Lodge, November 2, 1963 (S).
37. Saigon msg 975, Lodge to State, November 8, 1963 (S).
38. Saigon msg TOAID 1016, November 7, 1963 (C).
39. Saigon msg 975, op.cit.
40. CINCPAC msg to JCS 120604Z 63 (S).
41. Saigon msg 986, Lodge to State, November 9, 1963 (S), Highlights TF/Saigon's Weekly Progress Report.
42. Saigon msg 917, op.cit.
43. Douglas Pike, Viet Cong, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966), pp. 353-354.

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44. Ibid.
45. State msg 694, Rusk to Lodge, November 2, 1963 (S).
46. State msg 785, State to Lodge, November 13, 1963 (S).
47. Defense msg 944589, to CINCPAC, MACV, Lodge, November 9, 1963 (S).
48. Saigon msg 990, Lodge to State, November 11, 1963 (S).
49. "Summary of Special Meeting on the Republic of Vietnam," CINCPAC Headquarters, 20 November 1963 (TS), pp. 1-3.
50. Ibid., pp. 5-6.
51. Ibid., p. 12.
52. Ibid., pp. 3-5, 6-7.
53. Press release following the Honolulu Conference, November 20, 1963.
54. National Security Action Memorandum No. 273, November 26, 1963 (TS) (attached in appendix).
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.