

~~SECRET EYES ONLY~~
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19 September 1963

The Honorable Henry Cabot Lodge
The Ambassador of the United States
Saigon, South Viet Nam

Dear Cabot:

I am taking this means of communicating with you in the interests of privacy knowing that the use of the CIA channel, restrictive as it is, would mean that a few people on both ends would have access to my message to you.

I was told by Dean Rusk that you had proposed that General Lansdale come out to assist you and, in order to provide needed staff for contemplated operations, to replace Richardson as Chief of Station. Rusk explained that you spoke most highly of Richardson and therefore I assume that your suggestion was not because of dissatisfaction with John but more because you felt his relationships with the regime, and most particularly with Nhu, made it difficult for him to direct the organization in accordance with your wishes which I assume to mean you feel a "change" in South Viet Nam government a must.

First, Cabot, I wish to emphasize that the Agency will reorient the Saigon station in any practical way to meet your desires. Personnel, including the Station Chief, can be replaced; the station can be expanded or contracted and particular operations can be accelerated or stopped altogether. However, our Chiefs of Station must work in greatest intimacy with, and for that matter be directed by, a very large and experienced staff under Mr. Helms, who are experienced in, and understand the techniques of, directing field operations in such activities as positive intelligence, counterintelligence, covert political action, paramilitary training and operations, etc. To have a Station Chief in as an important a station as Saigon who is unacceptable to this organization would be unmanageable. Unfortunately General Lansdale would not be acceptable to the organization or to me personally. I will not go into details as to why this is true but some time when we are together I can tell you. Suffice it to say at this time that General Lansdale's use in the manner you propose in your letter would create insurmountable problems and therefore I must advise against it.

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I want to be abundantly clear however on Richardson. Despite Dean's statement that you hold John in high regard, I have reason to believe a problem might exist out there. My reason is that I have received the following report from a source that I consider responsible and absolutely dependable and I quote " - - -Mike Dunn, Special Assistant to Ambassador Lodge, had told Mr. Conein of our station that Ambassador Lodge was going to get rid of Richardson. Dunn has apparently spoken to other medium-level members of the station along the same line. In short, Dunn's conduct has been designed to give our station the impression that Mr. Richardson is a 'short-termer.' On one occasion, Dunn asked Conein 'Do you think that Dave Smith (Richardson's deputy) can run the station for a temporary period while a new Station Chief is being sent out here?' - - -"

This kind of talk apparently is accepted as being true in both the station and within our building here. I believe this most unfortunate. God knows it is difficult enough to deal with the various agencies and interested parties in the complicated matters we are dealing with in South Viet Nam without this kind of talk. Perhaps a word to Dunn on this matter would be in order. Also a word to Richardson, if you have the confidence in him which you apparently expressed.

Although I do not resist a change of Station Chief, I would counsel against precipitous action if we intend to try to work out any kind of an arrangement with the present regime even though on a short range basis. Richardson has valuable contacts and the confidence of some individuals in the regime, particularly Nhu, as well as certain generals, and these might be lost with his departure. However if the decision is to abandon all hope of working with the regime, then Richardson probably should be replaced. I think he is pretty firm in his mind that we must work with the regime for a period of time because, in the first place, there is no apparent means of replacing them and in the second there is no leadership on the horizon to take over which would guarantee an improvement over our present situation.

In addition Richardson is a man of great experience. He has been an area chief here (which is a position of very considerable importance) and he has been Station Chief in such important places as [redacted] and elsewhere. However we do have a man of satisfactory experience who has served with great skill in other trying situations and whom I would propose as a replacement for Richardson if you desire John removed.

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With respect to General Lansdale, I would counsel against sending him to Saigon unless it was for the purpose of conducting a series of friendly meetings with Diem based upon the background of Lansdale's personal relationship of many years' standing with Diem and a general recognition in Viet Nam and elsewhere that Lansdale was Diem's "maker and advocate". However final decision on this is yours and the Department's, not mine.

I am more disturbed over the situation that has developed in South Viet Nam than any recent crisis which has confronted this government. Neither I nor the Agency, nor the Intelligence Community, harbor any fixed policy position. This is not our business. We do feel it is our business, however, to analyze all available intelligence and to estimate the prospects of success of a course of action under consideration by the policy makers. We have no current intelligence nor resulting estimate in hand which would lead us to the conclusion that the present regime can be disposed of or that there exists a replacement regime which would be better. This is not however to say that a coup might not occur even before you receive this letter. Coup plotting is reported almost daily and has been for the last 18 months. However, my experience in this field tells me that coups that you hear about usually don't happen.

A sample of our experience with your problem is contained in the attached few pages of a review of our analysis of the political situation in South Viet Nam since June, 1962, which I appended to my daily report of yesterday to the Executive Committee.

On a personal note, I have just had a long visit with Ike and reviewed the Viet Nam situation in some detail. He realizes the problems as he lived for many years with Diem's intransigence and his manner of governing his people he felt would come to no good end. However he urges great care and deliberation, recognizing as we all do, the carrying off of a coup is no small task and even if successful the aftermath has its own special problems. He is distressed over the violent press and feels this in itself might make careful, objective appraisals difficult as was the case in Cuba in 1958. **

With warm personal regards, and again let me assure you of my desire to help you with your most trying and difficult task and of my friendship.

Sincerely,

/S/

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John A. McCone
Director

Attachment

**Handwritten in here: Ike bleeds for you - his friend - an
over