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12 NOV 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Record on Vietnam

1. Attached is a chronological listing of events, actions, and deliberations having to do with Vietnam. The official record was compiled from documents selected for file by Walter Eider. Significant overt happenings having bearing on official actions are included in the chronology. Facts on File, a weekly news summary, was used as the source for these historical events. The record opens with the Estimates of April and July 1963. The actual chronology, however, begins in August 1963 when the pagoda raids took place and your office began its file on Vietnam.

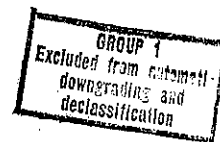
2. We took your office's file, chose from it those documents that seemed to us to be integral parts of the story, and then recorded their substance either by quoting selectively or by summarizing. When we found a reference to a document that was not in the file and which appeared to be important, we asked [redacted] to get a copy for us. (b)(3)

3. Pursuant to your instructions, I have told only General Carter and Mr. Kirkpatrick that this record was being compiled.

/S/ J. S. Earman

J. S. Earman
Inspector General

Attachment as stated
(TS 185214)

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TS 185214/1

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April 17

NIE 53-63

"Prospects in South Vietnam"

"We believe that Communist progress has been blunted and that the situation is improving. . . . Assuming no great increase in external support to the Viet Cong, changes and improvements which have occurred during the past year now indicate that the Viet Cong can be contained militarily and that further progress can be made in expanding the area of government control and in creating greater security in the countryside. . . . Developments during the last year or two also show some promise of resolving the political weaknesses, particularly that of insecurity of the countryside, upon which the insurgency has fed. . . . Despite South Vietnamese progress, the situation remains fragile. . . . The government's capacity to embark upon the broader measures required to translate military success into lasting political stability is questionable."

May 8

Riots erupted in Hue.

July 10

SNIE 53-2-63

"The Situation in South Vietnam"

"If--as is likely--Diem fails to carry out truly and promptly the commitment he has made to the Buddhists, disorders will probably flare again and the chances of a coup or assassination attempts against him will become even better. . . . We do not think. . . the Communists would necessarily profit if he were overthrown by some combination of his non-Communist opponents. A non-Communist successor regime might be initially less effective against the Viet Cong, but, given continued support from the US, could provide reasonably effective leadership for the government and the war effort."

~~TOP SECRET~~

1963

August 14

**Current Intelligence
Memorandum**

OCI No. 2339/63

"**Coup Rumors in South Vietnam**"

"..... The coup reports and rumors which have arisen since the Buddhist crisis seem to reflect some serious coup plotting but we have no firm evidence of advanced planning by any group to attempt to overthrow the regime....."

August 21

**The pagoda raids.
Martial law imposed.**

**Presidential Meeting on
Vietnam. CIA participants:
DCI, DDP, C/FE. Record
by C/FE.**

Discussion of US response to pagoda raids

Mr. Ball recommended that we continue to provide asylum for the two bonzes until Ambassador Lodge arrives and reviews the matter. It was agreed that official channels should not be made available for transmitting press dispatches by American reporters in Saigon. On the matter of possible alternate leadership in Vietnam, it was pointed out that there was no indication that Diem was not in full control.

**Current Intelligence
Memorandum**

OCI No. 2341/63

"**Coup Rumors in South Vietnam**"

"Additional reports of plotting against the Diem government have been received. While there is no hard evidence of imminent action, the Buddhist issue continues to make the situation dangerous."

**Saigon Station's
Chronology of August 1963
Coup Activities**

Concin meeting with General Don

At a meeting between Concin and General Don, the latter asked for US government assurances of support for moves against the Diem regime.

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August 22

**CIA cable to Saigon
DIR 63334**

CIA guidance supplementing State telegram re alternative leadership (Deptel 243)

"Ref Dept. telegram in process. Rastel (which Hqs. not yet seen) states basic line to be taken and directs it be pushed at all levels. Hilsman requested Hqs. send companion telegram to station pointing out that this is one technique to bring about surfacing of where and who real power is. Pressing this line can maximize possibility of obtaining US objective. Even if it does not succeed, it can substantially assist in identification of alternate or successor leadership with necessary drive, abilities and ambition, to incorporate in our overall contingency planning and serve as focus of buildup program. Hqs. will comment in farther detail after seeing message, if necessary, but passes above at Hilsman's request."

**CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 0208**

Richardson's personal views re alternate leadership

"..... Recent events have made us feel that hope for civilian government to replace Diem administration is unrealistic. The solution seems even more improbable than ever before. Would appear that we shall have either Diem or military junta..... View time factor have not coordinated this message with Embassy but we have exchanged views fully on subject matter."

August 23

**Current Intelligence
Memorandum
OCI No. 2342/63**

"The Buddhist Issue in South Vietnam"

"There is no clear evidence that the Diem government was practicing a policy of repression against the Buddhists before the initial incident in Hue on 8 May. However, up to that time no close contact was maintained by Western observers with Buddhist spokesmen..... A case can be made that the protests were partly political from the beginning....."

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1949
August 24

Telephone call from Mr.
Harriman to Mr. Helms.
Record by Mr. Helms

State telegram to Saigon
Deptel 243

Harriman informs Helms of the substance of Deptel 243

Mr. Harriman called Mr. Helms just before 2000 hours and outlined to him the substance of what eventually turned out to be Deptel 243 to Saigon. To Helms query, Harriman confirmed that the thrust of the telegram contained an implicit pull-out of American forces and support if the Nhu's were not ousted. Harriman said that the message had been cleared with Hyannisport with the Secretary of State, and with Mr. Gilpatric.

Guidance to the Ambassador on improving or replacing the Diem regime

The Department informs the Ambassador that the US government cannot tolerate a situation in which power lies in Nhu's hands. If Diem is unwilling to rid himself of Nhu, then Diem himself may have to go. The Ambassador is authorized: (1) to inform the GVN that actions against Buddhists must be redressed; (2) to tell key military leaders that the USG cannot support a Diem regime that includes the Nhu's and that "we will give them direct support in any interim period of breakdown central government mechanism"; (3) to make statements in Saigon removing the military taint on the pagoda raids. "The Ambassador and country team should urgently examine all possible alternative leadership and make detailed plans as to how we might bring about Diem's replacement if this should become necessary. You will understand that we cannot from Washington give you detailed instructions as to how this operation should proceed, but you will also know we will back you to the hilt on actions you take to achieve our objectives."

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August 25

**Cable from Hilsman to
Lodge (personal) sent via
CIA channels
DIR 63854**

Hilsman comment supplementing Deptel 243

"State cable sent separately represents agonizing at highest levels. Course outlined is dangerous but all agree that delaying clear cut US stand is even more dangerous. It won't be easy for you, but be assured we will back you all the way."

**CIA cable to Saigon
DIR 63855**

Hqs. points out danger posed by Deptel 243; directs CIA support.

"FYI CIA not consulted re cable being sent separately, which however cleared at highest levels. In circumstances believe CIA must fully accept directives of policy makers and seek ways accomplish objectives they seek. While have not seen exact text, understand it invites Lodge final judgment. . . . Danger in present course of action appears be throwing away bird in hand before we adequately identified birds in bush, or songs they may sing. Thus suggest a real search for courses of action which might retain options in our hands at same time as taking positive stand rather than waiting for situation to clarify (at which point we probably unable to affect it). This boils down to seeking some middle ground for at least interim period. . . ."

**CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 0291**

Saigon Station meeting with General Khanh

Richardson reports that General Khanh requested an immediate meeting with Spera. At the meeting Khanh requested assurances that the USG would support the Vietnamese army if it should move against the Diem regime.

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1963

**August 25
(cont'd)**

**CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 0296**

Initial Embassy meeting to discuss Deptel 243

Richardson reports results of conference among Lodge, Trueheart, Harkins, Weede and Richardson. The group agreed that giving Diem an option had no chance of success. Accepted Deptel 243 as a basic decision from Washington and would proceed to do best to carry out instructions. Richardson gives Hqs. his views on possible successor regimes.

August 26

**ONE Staff Memorandum
No. 60-63
Internal ONE Working Paper
CIA Distribution Only**

"Present Prospects for South Vietnam"

"On balance, we believe the best hope for the preservation of US interests and attainment of US objectives in South Vietnam lies in the possibility of a coup d'etat by anti-Communist nationalists with sufficient military support to obviate prolonged civil war. Such a group might not prove able to salvage the situation and, indeed, might eventually prove no better than the present regime. Such a development would, however, enable the US and anti-Communist nationalist elements to make a fresh start unencumbered and unhampered by political errors of past years, months, and weeks. In such a fresh start, we believe, lies the only viable hope for the attainment of US interests and objectives in South Vietnam."

**Ambassador Lodge
presented his credentials
to Diem.**

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TOP SECRET

**August 26
(cont'd)**

**Presidential Meeting on
Vietnam. CIA participants:
DDCI & DDP. Record by
DDP.**

Second thoughts on authorizations given Lodge in Deptel 243

The question was raised as to whether there had been such a significant change in the Vietnam situation that it really appeared desirable to dump the Nhu's and possibly Diem himself. Principal points discussed were: Admiral Felt's concern over the dangers inherent in the current US action in SVN; the fact that Lodge had not seen Diem to discuss the future role of the Nhu's; the meaning of the phrase "give direct support to military commanders" in Deptel 243; the question of succession; and what would happen if the action taken over the weekend failed. The President asked for another session on August 27 with participants to present biographic data on key SVN personalities and a contingency plan for the succession.

**CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 0304**

Saigon reports instructions given CIA officers seeing the generals

Richardson reports that the Ambassador decided that the American official hand should not show in the operation. It was agreed that Concin would see Khiem and that Spera would see Khanh. Concin and Spera were directed to convey the substance of Deptel 243, plus this comment: "We cannot be of any help during initial action of assuming power of state. Entirely their own action, win or lose."

**CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 0330**

Results of CIA approaches to the generals

Richardson reports the results of the Concin/Spera approaches to the generals. In essence, Khanh said he was not yet ready, and Khiem said he would have to check with Minh.

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August 27

**Presidential Meeting on
Vietnam. CIA participants:
DDGI, DBP, and C/FE.
Record by C/FE**

More second thoughts on the authorizations given Lodge in Deptel 243

The President stated that a coup should not be attempted unless it would be successful and asked whether we could turn back at this point. The President asked that the judgment of Lodge and Harkins be sought on the prospects for victory or defeat of a coup. A cable was drafted asking if they still agreed with their concurrences to Deptel 243.

**State telegram to Saigon
Deptel 256**

Lodge and Harkins are asked for an interim appraisal of prospects

"Examination of reports to date gives considerable hope but leaves unanswered questions. . . . Proceeding from the concept outlined in Deptel 243 as modified, now desire your prompt interim appraisal of present prospects. . . . Highest authority asks whether you and Harkins, in light of developing situation, presently favor operation as currently planned by generals. We wish to give you all possible support in best available course but not to insist on any decision that developing evidence makes it wise to modify."

August 28

**CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 0363**

GOS believes it too late to turn back from course being pursued

Richardson reports that: "Situation here has reached point of no return. . . . Unless the generals are neutralized before being able to launch their operations, we believe they will act and that they have good chance to win. . . . We all understand that the effort must succeed and that whatever needs to be done on our part must be done. . . ."

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1963

**August 28
(cont'd)**

**Presidential Meeting on
Vietnam. CIA participants:
DDCI, DDP, & C/FE.
Record by C/FE.**

Continuing concern over poor prospects for success of comp

The President inquired into the status of E&E plans and was told that these were well worked out. State Dept. participants insisted that Diem and Nhu had betrayed and double-crossed us and we had no obligations to them and that we cannot win with Diem and Nhu. The President commented that we had been winning until August. Nolting expressed his conviction that Diem is the only man who can run South Vietnam in any fashion to permit a continuance of the war effort. He believed we should make another try to keep Diem. Harriman directly disagreed with him. The President directed that a telegram be prepared to send to Lodge and Harkins asking their view of the chances of success, expressing concern over the unfavorable ratio of forces, and inviting their suggestions as to how we could increase their possibilities. The President called for another meeting later in the day.

**NSC Executive Committee
Meeting on Vietnam. CIA
participants not identified.
Record by DDP.**

The President met privately with Rusk, McNamara, Taylor and M. Bundy. He reported to the rest of the Committee merely that three telegrams were being sent to Saigon: A personal message to Lodge from the President, a general message from the Department to the Ambassador, and a telegram from Taylor to Harkins.

**Telegram from Taylor to
Harkins
JCS 3368-63**

Informs Harkins of Washington's second thoughts

"Important White House meeting on subject scheduled for 1200 28 August EDT, your views urgently needed on overall feasibility of operation contemplated. . . . FYI State to Saigon 243 was prepared without DOD or JCS participation. Authorities are now having second thoughts."

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1963
August 29

Saigon Station's
chronology of August 1963
coup activities

Taylor's cable to Harkins causes Richardson to change scenario

"At 0745 hours, Richardson, Spera and Conein, latter two of whom were scheduled to contact Generals Minh and Khiem at 0815 same morning, were shown a message from General Taylor to General Harkins stating aspects of Vietnam situation being reviewed at White House and commenting that second thoughts were beginning in Washington. Faced with this information and given strictly limited time factors, Richardson decided that the meeting with Generals Minh and Khiem should not be postponed but that contacting officers would make this meeting a fact-finding mission without encouraging or discouraging General Minh."

"When Spera and Conein returned from their meeting with Khiem and Minh, we proceeded to Trueheart's office to make our report. The Ambassador came in and Richardson advised him of our meeting with General Weede, of Taylor's cable, and of the decisions which Richardson had made as a result of the Taylor cable. Lodge was angry and expressed the view that Richardson's decision had destroyed the possibilities of carrying out a coup. Richardson expressed a firm dissenting opinion."

NSC Executive Committee
Meeting on Vietnam. CIA
participants not identified.
Record by DDP.

Steps to be taken to get the coup back on the track

The consensus was that Harkins should confirm to the generals that the approaches from CIA were bona fide and represented the views of the US government. There was agreement that better information was needed on what the generals were in fact planning to do and whether it was militarily feasible. A telegram giving the sense of the meeting was drafted for Presidential approval.

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August 30

Vice Presidential Meeting on Vietnam. CIA participants: DDCL, DDP, & C/FE. Record by C/FE.

Discussion of where coup planning went astray

Rusk referred to recent cable traffic and said that he was not even sure who we were dealing with or what they were planning. McNamara pointed out there was some question whether the generals ever did have plan. Bundy said he had re-read the earlier traffic and noted that they never said they did. Gen. Carter said he believed that the generals' coup was not likely at this stage and that in another week we will be approximately where we were before the attack on the Buddhist temples. Bundy suggested we consider additional contingencies before the group and whether the assumption that Nhu is impossible is well founded.

August 31

Saigon Station's chronology of August 1963 coup activities.

General Harkins' meeting with General Khiem

"General Harkins was authorized to meet with Khiem to give Khiem assurances of USG backing. Khiem showed a reluctance to talk and suggested that Harkins meet with General Minh. Khiem commented that Minh had called off the planning and was working on other methods which Khiem would not describe. Khiem further stated the Generals were not ready as they did not have enough forces under their control. Harkins decided not to give Khiem assurances which he had been authorized to impart. Lodge approved Harkins' decision on 31 August after Harkins reported."

Vice Presidential Meeting on Vietnam. CIA participants: DDCL, DDP, & C/FE. Record by C/FE.

Discussion of ways in which we might live with the Diem regime

Rusk suggested we look at precisely what in the Vietnam situation made us think of a coup and what might be done to improve conditions in Vietnam. McNamara suggested the first requirement was reestablishment of communication between Lodge and Harkins. Rusk directed that a telegram be prepared for Saigon making suggestions as to what we might ask the GVN to do.

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1963August 31
(cont'd)Memorandum for W. Elder
from Chief, FEMr. Colby, who participated in the meetings of late August,
prepared this summary of differing positions taken.

"In the discussions during the past week, the position of the Department of State, led by Ball, Harriman, and Hillsman, was that the Diem-Nhu government had double-crossed the US government because of the attack on the pagodas and that US obligations to the government were no longer valid. Further, that a government so discredited could not conduct successfully the war in Vietnam and would prove an undesirable liability to the US Government elsewhere in Asia. Because of these moral, military and political conclusions, the Department recommended that it must give all support to a group of generals who allegedly were disaffected to the point that a clear indication of US action was the only ingredient lacking for them to push over a discredited, unpopular and weak Diem government.

"The position of the Department of Defense was that while it deplored the sensational aspects of the Buddhist situation, it nonetheless felt that an effort should be continued to deal with Diem and try to bring about a compromise, and at the same time to keep in touch with the generals and support the coup efforts, if this proved to be the only alternative left. This was essentially the view of General Harkins and of Ambassador Nolting. This was considered by the Department of State to be a foot-dragging and weak position.

"The President viewed the State Department's position with considerable reserve but was willing to explore the coup idea further. He and the Attorney General (as well as CIA) were apparently appalled at the speed with which the State decision was reached on Saturday afternoon, 24 August, and felt that more thought, analysis and preparation should have preceded the instruction to Lodge."

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1963

Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05594020

August 31
(cont'd)

CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 0499

Saigon Station reports collapse of August coup plot

"This particular coup is finished. . . . Generals did not feel ready and did not have sufficient balance of forces. . . . There is little doubt that GVN aware US role and may have considerable detail. . . ."

September 2

CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 0523

Richardson's damage assessment report

Richardson concluded that Diem and the Nhu's are fully aware that the USG encouraged the generals to attempt a coup and that CIA was the instrumentality of this encouragement. He judged there was an even possibility that all major programs could go forward as in the past. He listed as a major dilemma the Station's future relationships with Col. Tung. He noted his dissatisfaction with Tung as a GVN liaison vehicle through which to conduct PM programs, but noted that the GVN had offered no alternative. Unless we are willing to discontinue our NVN, Laos border, and cross-border programs, we must continue to work with Tung.

Times of Vietnam charge
of CIA coup plotting

The Times of Vietnam published charges that the CIA was plotting and financing a coup and giving asylum to the chief anti-Diem Buddhist leader. The story was picked up and widely played by the New York Daily News, the Chicago Tribune, Baltimore Sun, and other prominent newspapers.

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Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05594020

September 6 Presidential Meeting on Vietnam. CIA participants: BDP & C/FE. Record by BDP & C/FE.

Further discussion of ways of working with the Diem regime

Rusk stressed the immediate need for direct contact between Lodge and Diem. Bundy pointed out the necessity of advising Lodge not to have a real show-down with Diem over Nhu at his forthcoming meeting, as one of Lodge's cables indicated he was headed very much in this direction. Rusk agreed to do this. The President agreed with the desirability of silencing Madame Nhu but expressed some doubt that Nhu's participation was as fatal as State seemed to say it was. Rusk commented that the country team had stated its feeling that Nhu must go, to which the President replied that they may have been operating under directives received from here.

September 8 Newspaper accounts of CIA support of Col. Tung's forces

Wire services and prominent newspapers carried a story that the Special Forces troops who raided the pagodas on 21 August were still being paid secretly by CIA. This story was attributed to a highly reliable source in Washington and gave details of support to Col. Tung in the amount of \$3 million annually, and a payment of \$250 thousand on 3 September. This story was datelined in Washington and Manila.

AID statement on possible aid cuts

David Bell warned (in a television interview) that the US Congress might cut back aid to South Vietnam unless the Diem government changed its policies.

September 10 Presidential interview by Huntley and Brinkley

The President denied the charge that CIA makes its own policy.

CIA cable from Saigon SAIG 0760

Richardson's views on prospects for immediate future

"Am inclined to feel general officers will seek evolutionary accommodation with Diem (if he permits them to do so) unless overall situation clearly deteriorates, there is breakdown of civil order or governmental machinery, or unless war effort

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**September 10
(cont'd)**

**CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 0760 (cont'd)**

begins to go backward seriously. . . . Despite damages suffered since 8 May and 21 August, am inclined to believe we should be able resume successful prosecution of war in military and civil sections. . . . Do not align myself with the view that USG should suspend aid. . . ."

**Presidential Meeting on
Vietnam. CIA participants:
DCI & C/FE. Record by
C/FE.**

Krulak reports his findings; optimism vs. pessimism; need for
US government to speak with one voice

Gen. Krulak reported his findings in Vietnam. His conclusions were that the war is going ahead at an impressive pace and that the Viet Cong war will be won if current US military and sociological programs are continued. Mendenhall, the State representative who accompanied Krulak, expressed the view that there was a complete breakdown of the Saigon civilian government and the security situation in the provinces had deteriorated. The President asked whether the two gentlemen had visited the same country. Rusk suggested that the focus should be on what happened in July and August that reversed the optimistic judgments in May and June. Mr. McCone pointed out the National Estimate in May [17 April], which indicated that we could win, was followed by a Special Estimate on 10 July stating that GVN relations with its public and the US are deteriorating and that victory is doubtful if not impossible. The President emphasized the necessity that different agencies not express differing views on the situation, quoting various press stories to this effect. He stated that it is necessary to bring our government together to speak as one government. Mr. McCone talked from a personal telegram he had received from Richardson recommending against any cut in aid.

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September 10 NSC Executive Committee
(cont'd) Meeting on Vietnam.

CIA participants: DCI &
C/FE. Record by C/FE

Follow-up meeting on points raised by President that morning

Bundy stressed the need to unify the US government posture, to coordinate press guidance, and to control outgoing messages to Saigon. He emphasized the importance of following the President's guidance on this delicate Vietnam problem, despite intensely different views as to what should be done, how, the risks, minimum objectives, and the facts. McNamara stated that his position was vigorously against throwing out this government without seeing an alternative and that none appeared to exist. Mr. McCone commented that the problem was not so much the existence of an alternative as how to put one into power. Bundy summarized the President's position as one in which we must express our reservations as to the mistakes and misdeeds of Diem but not be in a position where we cannot deal with him further.

September 11 CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 0797

Saigon Station reports disagreements among country team members

Richardson reports that the country team attempted to agree on a six-page summary cable to answer a cable from the Department requesting views. The team was unable to agree even on the first three pages of the summary. Weede and Richardson dissented on the basis that the draft summary was too sweeping and too negative, concluding definitely about the country as a whole on an inadequate basis of data. "In some ways we seem to have reached the point in official American community that, if you think we can win with present government, you are simply not running in right direction with the majority."

State telegram from Saigon
No. 478

Lodge estimates situation worsening rapidly and urges sanctions

"My best estimate of the current situation in Vietnam is:
(a) that it is worsening rapidly; (b) that the time has arrived for the US to use what effective sanctions it has to bring about the fall of the existing government and the installation of another;

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1962

September 11
(cont'd)

State telegram from Saigon
No. 478 (cont'd)

and (c) that intensive study should be given by the best brains in the government to all the details, procedures, and variants in connection with the suspension of aid."

Presidential Meeting on
Vietnam. CIA participants:
DCI & C/FE. Record by
C/FE.

Discussion of steps necessary before deciding to cut aid

McNamara pointed out that Lodge has had little contact with Diem and has not been out of Saigon. Mr. McCone commented that he believed that we should move cautiously, that we should talk seriously to Diem and that Lodge should be urged to visit the countryside to obtain a more realistic view of the effect of suspending aid. Mr. McCone also suggested that another approach be made to Nhu to seek his cooperation in a departure. The President asked whether we had carefully studied the detailed effects of cuts in aid (as proposed in a paper prepared by Hillsman). It was evident that the effects had not been studied. The President asked DOD and CIA to analyze the Hillsman paper. He also asked that a telegram be sent to Lodge asking him to try to reduce the press leakage in Saigon and to establish some real contact with Diem. Any current plans for aid negotiations should be stalled, and the President said he should be well informed of any steps taken in this context--such as the incident involving CIA payment to Col. Tung last week.

NSC Executive Committee
Meeting on Vietnam.

CIA participants: DCI &
C/FE. Record by C/FE.

State Department begins to see no alternative to working with Diem

Rusk said he believed that we were not likely to achieve an independent Vietnam unless we could eliminate Nhu. At the same time he was not willing to say that Diem should go, as he saw no alternative. Rusk commented that we should work through Lodge on Diem to take over the real leadership and become the real President. Mr. McCone suggested also the desirability of negotiating with Nhu. Bundy read off a CIA suggestion for a process of negotiating with Nhu.

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1963

September 13 CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 0890

Sheldon's views on Vietnam: Lodge still pursuing coup effort

Mr. Sheldon reports his views on the situation in Vietnam. He included as part of his report the substance of a discussion with DCM Trueheart: "The Ambassador is considering charging MACV with making approach to SVN military, he mentioned Gen. Don, to attempt stimulate early coup action with appropriate US assurances. I inquired had Ambassador made such proposal to Washington and was told this was within Lodge's authority."

September 15 Press reports of dissension
within US mission and
within CIA Saigon Station

Neil Sheehan writing from Saigon stated that the various elements of the US mission in Vietnam were so badly divided that Washington had intervened. He said: "The only civilian official still strongly in favor of going along with the Ngo family regime is the Chief of the Central Intelligence Agency here." On the same day David Halberstam stated that high US civilian officials in Saigon were making an all-out effort to convince Washington that the military and political situation is deteriorating. He said that "the Chief of the Central Intelligence Agency favors all-out support for the present regime but that almost all other members of his staff are embittered over the raids on the pagodas. They also feel that their Chief's close association with Nhu, while necessary, has severely damaged intelligence gathering."

September 16 CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 0922

Saigon Station's views on need to work with Diem regime

Richardson replies to Washington request for his judgment on desirability and feasibility of certain ideas, as Washington is in the course of constructing an agreed plan for steps ahead: "We must go on trying to win war with current administration for as long as it persists in power. . . . We should not attempt publicly to achieve objectives with respect to GVN when probability of attainment is virtually nil. . . . We cannot covertly tinker with or engineer a coup unless general situation is

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September 16 CIA cable from Saigon
(cont'd) SAIG 0922 (cont'd)

reasonably propitious and if we are unable to establish necessary working contacts with Vietnamese leaders willing and able to do the job with necessary means. . . . Do not believe that Diem and Nhu are at this point in time as oblivious to US and world opinion as some observers think. . . . Ambassador now, Trueheart, and COS consider it virtual impossibility persuade or pressure Diem into removing Nhu or to silence Madame Nhu for any period of time. Nor are we sanguine that Nhu's temporary withdrawal from scene can be achieved. . . . Leaving Nhu to CIA COS is not enough to achieve appropriate influence through him on Diem. . . . Agree we should carefully explore and perhaps carefully experiment with graduated measures designed to pressure Diem, within context of persuading him, to take steps needed. These measures would be more effective if they are limited to practical and achievable objectives. . . ."

September 17 Memorandum for the Record
Prepared by DDP

DDP conversation with David Smith re possible ouster of Richardson

"Smith. . . discussed with me. . . reports that Lodge wanted get rid of Mr. John Richardson. . . . Mike Dunn. . . had told Conein. . . that Lodge was going 'to get rid of Richardson'. . . . On one occasion Dunn asked Conein, 'Do you think that Dave Smith can run the station for a temporary period while a new Station Chief is being sent out here?'" [see also entry for October 5]

September 19 State telegram from Saigon
No. 544

Lodge changes position; agrees must work with Diem regime

Lodge to the President: "I agree that no good opportunity for action to remove present government in immediate future is apparent and that we should, therefore, do whatever we can as an interim measure pending such an eventuality. . . . Frankly, I see no opportunity at all for substantive changes."

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September 19 State telegram from Saigon
(cont'd) No. 545

Lodge views Washington's proposed actions as not attainable

Lodge to the President: "I am in general agreement with list of 'possible helpful actions' with the important qualification that items are for most part not possible of attainment. They involve leopard's changing his spots....."

Personal letter from
McGone to Lodge

The DCI offers to reorient station but considers Lansdale not acceptable as replacement for Richardson

"I was told by Dean Rusk that you had proposed that General Lansdale...replace Richardson as Chief of Station....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....Lansdale would not be acceptable to the organization or to me personally....If the decision is to abandon all hope of working with the regime, then Richardson probably should be replaced....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....."

September 20 State telegram from Saigon
No. 555

Lodge stresses the need for pressing on with the Diem regime

Lodge to the President: "I believe that we might face a situation after the appropriation bill has been voted in which no coup has taken place and in which we are faced with the simple but unpleasant choice of pressing on vigorously with Diem and Nhu or else not pressing on at all. Under these circumstances, I think we should definitely press on....."

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September 23 DCI Congressional Briefing CIA Subcommittee of House Armed Services

The Director said there did not appear to be any cohesive military group capable of ousting the Diem regime, and further that there appeared to be no replacement for the then current regime which was capable of running the government. A new regime probably would be no better. Consequently, the Agency was urging a cautious, slow approach to the problem.

**September 26 Memorandum prepared by
Mr. McCone**

"CIA Activities in South Vietnam"

This seven-page memorandum gives a brief history of the Saigon Station. It records that the Director travelled extensively in South Vietnam in June 1962 and reported upon his return that repressive measures of the regime were causing considerable criticism and that there was danger of a coup. For the next eighteen months COS, Saigon, at the direction of the Ambassador, met once every two weeks with Nhu. The memorandum gives a concise account of the Agency's position during the latter days of August 1963: "A cable was sent to the Ambassador instructing him to insist on effective reforms including reducing the influence and authority of the Nhu's and if this could not be accomplished by persuasion to take such action as would accomplish this objective, even though it meant removing the regime. At this point CIA was asked by the Ambassador and General Harkins to query certain military leaders and to determine whether the resentment had created a body of opinion among the military, the Security Forces, and the public that would carry off a coup and establish a new Government. CIA reported that this condition did not exist. During the week of August 26 and without taking a position as to whether the regime should or should not be removed, the Agency urged care and deliberation. It pointed out that to act precipitously and without assurance of success a civil war would inevitably result, the war against the Viet Cong would be lost, and the Communists would take over.

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September 26 Memorandum prepared by
(cont'd)
Mr. McCone
(cont'd)

This position was highly exasperating to those who wished to move precipitously. It is for this reason that the advocates of action to move precipitously without coordination and without intelligence support are now carrying on a campaign against the CIA and the Station."

September 28 State telegram from Saigon
No. 609

Sources of support for Col. Tung's forces

"CAS provides per diem allowances to the 31st and 77th Special Forces Groups, elements of which participated in the pagoda raids, when engaged in jointly approved operations against the Viet Cong. All other expenses are derived from MAP funds. During the recent martial law phase, CAS disallowed Col. Tung's request for per diem payments for those units while they were in Saigon..... The degree of support provided by CAS to projects serving current politically repressive activities is rather limited and in the cases of Tung's service and the police is overshadowed by the far greater degree of support provided by the US Special Forces and the Public Safety Division respectively."

September 30 Personal letter from
Lodge to McCone

Lodge's reply to the DCI's letter in which the DCI refused to accept Gen. Lansdale as Chief of Station, Saigon

"I am really disappointed by your decision as I think Ed might have been the man to get things started here. I will, of course, welcome whoever you plan to send out and am delighted to have you say that you would reorient matters here. Very frankly, I do not understand how it all operates here and it appears to me that a number of reorientations should be made. Bob McNamara is here and he and I have talked about it and I believe he will talk to you."

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1961

October 2

**Report of McNamara-Taylor
Mission to Vietnam**

The report concludes the war is going well and the bulk of US
forces can be withdrawn by the end of 1965

The President on 21 September had directed Taylor and McNamara to proceed to South Vietnam to appraise the situation. Their trip lasted from September 24 to October 2. The most significant conclusions of the report were: (1) The military campaign has made great progress and continues to progress. (2) There are serious political tensions in Saigon. (3) There is no solid evidence of the possibility of a successful coup. The most significant recommendations were: (1) A program be established to train Vietnamese so that essential functions now performed by US military personnel can be carried out by Vietnamese by the end of 1965. It should be possible to withdraw the bulk of US personnel by that time. (2) Continue to withhold commitment of funds in the commodity import program. (3) Advise Diem that support for Col. Tung's forces will be cut off unless they are promptly assigned to the control of the Joint General Staff and transferred to the field. (4) Maintain the present purely "correct" relations with the top levels of the GVN.

October 3

**Personal letter from
Lodge to McGone**

Lodge confirms his desire that Richardson be replaced.

".....I agree with what I understand McNamara has said to you. The time has come for a new face. But, I also think of Richardson as a devoted and patriotic American....."

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October 4

CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 1297Richardson reports conversation with Lodge re Richardson's custer

".....As a personal matter, Lodge would be pleased for me to continue here. On other hand, he feels that my liaison with Nhu has resulted in atmospheric disadvantages since Nhu has become world-wide personal devil and one-man symbol of all that is wrong in South Vietnam.Lodge repeated that his position has nothing to do with differences of opinion between us.....In sum, it is clear that Lodge wants a change in Chief of Station.....Departing Saigon 1820 hours 5 October....."
[Richardson's departure was based on a Hqs. request that he return Hqs. TDY as soon as possible.]

October 5

CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 1434Saigon speculates on origin of Halberstam story on COS custer

Richardson refers to the Halberstam story in the NY Times of October 4 on Richardson's custer. In this cable he dates the Dunn comment to Conein re Lodge wanting rid of Richardson [see September 17 entry] to a dinner party at Conein's home on September 6. The party was attended by Dunn, Bohannon, Mrs. Phillips, Joe Alsop, Pepper Martin, and Keyes Beech.

Presidential Meeting on
Vietnam. CIA participants:
DCI only. Record by DCI.

Discussion of a draft telegram to Saigon arising out of the
McNamara-Taylor report of October 2

Re what eventually became Deptel 534. DCI said it was the opinion of CIA (with the exception of Colby) that fiddling with the CIP as a political lever would be much more likely to create an economic crisis undermining the war effort than to scare Diem and Nhu into a more cooperative attitude because it would seriously affect the confidence and planning of the Vietnamese business community and quickly engender inflationary measures among the population at large of a more serious nature.

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(cont'd)Presidential Meeting on
Vietnam. CIA participant:
DCI only. Record by DCI.
(cont'd)

All agreed that aid to Tung should be suspended until and unless these forces were placed under effective operational control of the Joint General Staff and committed to field operations. DCI stated that a review of all of our instruments and studies on the situation, together with reports from Agency officers who had travelled extensively in the area, confirmed that progress was being made in the war effort but expressed the opinion that the progress was not as great and the outlook not as rosy as the McNamara-Taylor report indicated. Moreover, it was the Agency's feeling that, while the political situation had not as yet seriously affected the war effort, probability of it so doing in the future was in our opinion greater than indicated in the McNamara-Taylor report. DCI went on to say that he could envisage Diem acceding to the suggestions under the military recommendation, and quite possibly agree to relocate Col. Tung's forces under the Joint General Staff, but refuse to move satisfactorily in the political area. DCI said that this would be most unfortunate and would confront us with a very serious problem because the successful prosecution of the war was, among other things, contingent upon some political movements which would change the image of the regime with the South Vietnamese people. McNamara seemed inclined to rest the case totally with a satisfactory response to the recommended military actions. Rusk pointed out the importance of some political actions. Harriman was noncommittal. It was the consensus of the meeting, however, that some meaningful political movements had to be made but exactly what they should be was not determined.

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**October 5
(cont'd)**

**Saigon Station's "History
of the Vietnamese
Generals' Coup"**

**State cable to Saigon
No. 534**

**White House cable to Saigon
CAP 63560**

General Minh requests assurances re US position on coup attempt

In a meeting with Conein (approved by the Ambassador on October 2), Minh requested a statement of the US position with respect to a change in the GVN in the near future. He said he did not expect USG support of a coup effort, but did need USG assurances that the USG would not try to thwart his plans.

**Guidance to the Ambassador resulting from NSC consideration
of the October 2 McNamara-Taylor report**

(1) Existing suspension of new commitments under the AID Commodity Import Program will be maintained. (2) PL 480 (condensed milk) will be handled on a month-to-month basis but will not be suspended. (3) AID Project Loans will be "suspended for review." (4) US will no longer furnish support to Col. Tung's forces unless they are placed under control of the Joint General Staff and committed to field operations. (5) Ambassador should continue policy of "cool correctness" toward GVN. (6) General Harkins should assume burden of pressure for military actions, without waiting for initiative by Diem.

President approves policy of no active encouragement of coup

"... President today approved recommendation that no initiative should now be taken to give any active covert encouragement to a coup. There should, however, be urgent covert effort with closest security under broad guidance of Ambassador to identify and build contacts with possible alternative leadership as and when it appears....."

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October 7

**Memorandum for
the Record prepared
by H. Knoche.**

Debriefing of John Richardson upon his return to headquarters

The memorandum gives details on the sequence of events leading to his recall. Ambassador Lodge said that there had been no differences of opinion between the two but that the main problem was that Nhu had become a symbol of evil and that the Nhu-Richardson relationship was undesirable. Richardson explained that he had been able to give the Ambassador the first briefing on the Station's activities only last Wednesday, October 2. The DCI told Richardson he thought it was poor judgment not to have checked with the Ambassador in some way before making his decision on the day of the meeting with Minh. [see August 29 entry].

**Memorandum for the
Director from Chester L.
Cooper
TS 174718**

CIA Working Group Comment on Deptel 534

"In sum, our general impression is that this cable, though it contains a number of good features, reflects a continuing Washington inability to face up to certain key decisions. We shall not attempt to re-raise policy issues on which we have already been heard (e.g., our questioning the feasibility of using the Commercial Import Program as a political club). We do feel, however, that the desired ends of Deptel 534 could be better served by supplementary instructions to the Ambassador which add considerations Deptel 534 does not treat, and provide clearer guidance on the existing text."

October 8

**The UN General Assembly
agreed to send a fact-finding
mission to South Vietnam
to investigate charges of
government oppression of
Buddhists.**

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October 9

**President's News
Conference**

Comment re Richardson and CIA's adherence to policy guidance

"I know that the transfer of Mr. John Richardson, who is a very dedicated public servant, has led to surmises, but I can assure you flatly that the CIA has not carried out independent activities, but has operated under close control of the Director of Central Intelligence operating under the--with the cooperation of the National Security Council and under my instructions."

**CIA cable to Saigon
Eyes Only for Ambassador
DIR 74228**

Additional guidance supplementing CAP 63560

". . . . While we do not wish to stimulate coup, we also do not wish to leave impression that US 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 US." The cable urges that Minh's contact press for detailed information clearly indicating that Minh's plans offer a high prospect of success.

October 10

**Saigon Station's "History
of the Vietnamese Generals'
Coup"**

Ambassador's instructions re CIA contacts with the generals

The Ambassador instructed CIA not to initiate contact with Generals Minh or Don, but if the generals initiate contact, such contacts were authorized. In the course of meetings with Minh or Don, assurances were to be given as specified in DIR 74228.

DCI Congressional Briefing

Senate Foreign Relations Committee

"We have not seen a successful government in the wings that we could say positively would be an improvement over Diem. Therefore, it has been our counsel that we must proceed cautiously, otherwise a situation might flare up which might result in something of a civil war, and the Communists would come out the victor merely by sitting on the sidelines."

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- October 12** **State telegram from Saigon** **Lodge urges appointment of David Smith as Chief of Station**
No. 690
- "Acting Chief of Station has performed exceptionally well, and I would like to recommend his appointment as Chief of Station."
- October 14** **State telegram to Saigon** **The President asks for weekly personal reports on Vietnam**
Deptel 576
- The President asks Lodge for an immediate report and weekly reports thereafter on the progress of the war in Vietnam and the effects of the actions authorized in Deptel 534.
- October 16** **State telegram from Saigon** **Lodge forwards his reply to Deptel 576 re situation in Vietnam**
No. 712
- "..... We appear to me to be doing little more than holding our own..... It is perhaps too early to conclude that the government will not make some positive moves, but it is now doing the opposite of what we would like to see done..... So far we appear to be getting virtually no effect from our actions under Deptel 534, but we would not have expected effects this early..... I oppose continuing to withhold commercial imports to a point where an economic crisis is produced....."
- State telegram to Saigon** **Washington approves Lodge visit to Washington**
No. 583
- "The President and Secretary concur that a brief visit by you to Washington at end of October would be helpful....."

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October 21

CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 1849Station explanation of lower volume of intelligence reporting

Hqs. had expressed its concern over falling off of volume of reporting from Saigon. The Station replies: "No question but that policy of 'cool correctness' has affected overt reporting. . . . Lack of communication at highest levels especially pronounced. . . . Present situation also of course makes case officer contact with clandestine sources much more difficult. . . ."

October 23

DCI Congressional Briefing

Far East Subcommittee of House Foreign Affairs

A successful coup may or may not be an improvement, and discouragement was indicated over the possibility of the Diem regime reforming its ways and regaining the confidence of the people. On the other hand, there seemed to be no replacement government waiting in the wings and the generals for the most part had no political experience. Hence it might be assumed that some protracted period of political confusion would result from a coup, and the effect that this might have on the future of the war could not be determined.

Saigon Station's "History
of the Vietnamese Generals'
Coup"

The generals' plan for a coup in the week following October 26

At a meeting with Conein requested by General Don, Don said the generals had decided to try to stage a coup within a week following October 26. Conein, under instructions, passed the substance of DIR 74228 to Don. Don promised he would seek permission of the coup committee to give Conein their political plan for the Ambassador's eyes only.

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October 24

**Memorandum for the
Record prepared by
Executive Director**

**Discussion with Kenneth Hansen, Bureau of the Budget, on
charges against CIA by Lodge**

At Hansen's initial meeting with Lodge, Lodge made these charges: (1) CIA was improperly dealing with Nhu; (2) CIA was reluctant to turn over to the military its operations among the hill tribes; (3) CIA had inadequate penetrations of the CVN and the Buddhists and was caught by surprise; (4) Richardson had a palatial mansion and entertained government officials there; (5) The CIA Station was too large and too visible; (6) CIA acted on its own initiative without coordination and without any control from either the Ambassador or Washington.

Hansen later reported to Lodge that he thought Lodge's charges were erroneous. He said he was convinced that everything CIA had done in Vietnam had been approved in Washington, coordinated with and carried out under the directions of the Ambassador, and had been carried out with both good judgment and a high quality of professionalism.

Hansen noted that at the time of his first meeting with Lodge, Lodge had not yet had a full briefing on what the Agency was doing and that this occurred a few days later.

**Saigon Station's "History
of the Vietnamese Generals'
Coup"**

Follow-up meetings between Conein and General Don

Conein held two meetings with General Don on October 24. Don reported he had been informed by General Harkins that the US military would not thwart any coup plans. Don said the coup plans were complete; that the necessary military units were available; and that the coup would occur no later than November 2. In the second meeting, Don said the coup committee refused to turn over the political plan but authorized Don to outline its substance, which he did.

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October 24
(cont'd)

CIA cable to Saigon
DIR 78161

The White House expresses reservations over handling of contacts with the generals

Eyes only for Lodge and Harkins from Bundy. "..... There may be danger Nhu attempting entrapment through Don's approaches to Conein. Feel quite strongly that Lodge and Harkins should stand back from any non-essential involvement. It seems wise to maintain close control over meetings between Don and Conein."

CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 1964

Lodge replies to Bundy's cable (DIR 78161)

Bundy from Lodge. "CAS has been punctillious in carrying out my instructions. I have personally approved each meeting between General Don and Conein who has carried out my orders in each instance explicitly."

October 25

Presidential Meeting on Vietnam. CIA participant: DCI only. Record by DCI.

Coup plotting; USG policy, DCI's views

The President stated the purpose of the meeting was to consider: (1) recent actions in SVN with respect to coup planning and qualifications of the individuals reporting, and (2) our policy in SVN as he wished to be assured there was unanimity within the government prior to the return of Lodge. The DCI stated his views in detail and his memorandum should be consulted for the full text. In essence, he held: (1) Don might be managed by Nhu; (2) CIA has no control and therefore could assume little responsibility; (3) Don could have a coup in the making and could pull it off; (4) We were handling a delicate situation in a non-professional manner; (5) Successful coup would lead to confusion because generals would provide weak leadership; (6) One coup would be followed by another and the war might be lost during period of political confusion; (7) Civilians capable of running SVN could not be injected into the government and exercise effective control; (8) Cannot discuss important political issues with Diem because of the policy of "correct, cool attitude"; (9) We either have to work with Diem and Nhu or we have to take aggressive steps to remove them, and it is not clear that the succeeding government would be much better.

October 28

**Saigon Station's "History
of the Vietnamese Generals'
Coup"**

Lodge confirms Concin's bona fides to Don

Don asked Lodge if Concin was speaking for the Ambassador. Lodge replied in the affirmative. Don told the Ambassador the USG should not interfere or try to stimulate a coup. The Ambassador agreed.

**Saigon Station's "History
of the Vietnamese Generals'
Coup"**

Last Concin/Don meeting before the coup was launched

Don confirmed that he had talked to the Ambassador who had vouched for Concin. Don stated he was leaving on October 29 to coordinate final plans. Don requested Concin to remain at home from October 30 onward until further notice. Don repeated that the Ambassador would have the plans before the coup but when pressed on his previous commitment to make them available 48 hours in advance, Don stated that possibly the plans could only be made available 4 hours in advance. Don said nothing would be happening within the next 48 hours and that, if there was a good reason for the Ambassador to change his planned October 31 departure, the Ambassador would be informed in time to make his own decision.

October 29

**CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 2949**

Lodge gives his views on current coup plotting

In an eyes only cable sent via CIA channels, Lodge gives his views on the seemingly imminent coup. "In summary, it would appear that a coup attempt by the generals' group is imminent...and that no positive action by the USG can prevent a coup attempt short of informing Diem and Nhu.... Although there have been no requests to date by the generals for material or financial support, we must anticipate that such request may be forthcoming....."

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October 29

**Presidential Meeting on
Vietnam. CIA participants:
DCI, DDP, & C/FE. Report
by DDP & C/FE.**

Discussion of chances of success of the planned coup

It was suggested that in the Ambassador's absence, Harkins, Trueheart, and David Smith act as a committee to direct any coup operation. DCI countered with the view that Smith should not be involved in such a policy-making function although he would be in a position to provide technical advice to Harkins and Trueheart as well as carry out their instructions in the operational field. The President stated that if the forces in Saigon were not clearly in favor of the coup, we should discourage its launching. The Attorney General felt the US was risking too much based on flimsy evidence. The DCI stated his view that even a successful coup would create a period of interregnum and confusion which might only be solved by a second or third coup.

October 30

**CIA Cable to Saigon
DIR 79109**

Bundy to Lodge cable giving detailed guidance re coup posture

"..... chances of action with or without our approval now so significant that we should urgently consider our attitude and contingency plans..... Believe our attitude to coup group can still have decisive effect on its decision..... We must have assurance balance of forces clearly favorable..... Cincin should express to Don that we do not find presently revealed plans give clear prospect of quick results..... We badly need some corroborative evidence whether Minh and others directly and completely involved..... highest authority desires it clearly understood that after your departure Harkins should participate in supervision of all coup contacts and that in event a coup begins, he become head of country team....."

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October 30
(cont'd)

CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 2063

Lodge's reply to guidance given in EIR 79109

".....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.....I believe we should continue our present position of keeping hands off but continue to monitor and press for more detailed information. CAS has been analyzing forces for some time and it is their estimate that the generals have probably figured their chances pretty closely.....It does not seem sensible to have the military in charge of a matter which is so profoundly political as a change of government.....As to requests from the generals, they may well have need of funds at the last moment with which to buy off potential opposition. To the extent that these funds can be passed discreetly, I believe we should furnish them.....If we were convinced that the coup was going to fail, we would of course do everything we could to stop it. Gen. Harkins has read this and does not concur."

CIA cable to Saigon
CAF 63598
DIR 79407

Strongly worded cable rejecting much of Lodge's view in SAIG 2063

".....We do not accept as a basis for US policy that we have no power to delay or discourage a coup.....We cannot limit ourselves to proposition implied in your message that only conviction of certain failure justifies intervention.....US authorities will reject appeals for direct intervention from either side....." The White House repeats its instructions on command of the country team after Lodge leaves.

CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 2094

Lodge replies to DIR 79407

"Thanks for your sagacious instruction. Will carry out to best of my ability."

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November 1 **The coup began at 1315 hours**
November 1, Saigon time.
This is equivalent to 0015
November 1, Washington time.

Saigon Station's "History of
the Vietnamese Generals'
Coup"

Station contact with coup principals after coup began; passage
of funds

Conein was contacted by the Aide de Camp to General Don who said that Conein was wanted immediately at General Staff Headquarters. He said the coup was in progress. Conein alerted the Station via radio. Upon arrival, General Don told Conein that Don had tried unsuccessfully to reach Conein earlier by telephone. A later check revealed that Conein's telephone was out of order. Conein was told that he was to keep a telephone line open to the Ambassador.

SAIG 2662 of November 25 gives additional details: SAIG 2063 contains Ambassador's statement on the passing of funds to the coup principals. Response to SAIG 2063 contained in DIR 79407 stated "Once a coup under responsible leadership has begun... it is in the interest of the US government that it should succeed." A/COS interpreted this as general approval of funds which had been mentioned in SAIG 2063. When Don's aide appeared at Conein's home and informed him the coup was in progress, he requested Conein to bring with him as much money as he could readily lay hands upon. Funds had been stored at Conein's home against such an emergency. Conein took three million piastres with him. "As of November 25, this disbursement of funds had not been discussed with the Ambassador." (The records do not indicate that the disbursement of these funds was ever revealed to the Ambassador).

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November 1

**Presidential Meeting on
Vietnam. CIA participants:
DCI, DDI, Cooper, C/FE.
Record by Cooper.**

CIA Briefing on coup progress; recognition of new regime

The meeting was devoted primarily to a briefing by Mr. Colby on the coup. The principal question on the President's mind was that of rationalizing a policy of recognizing a successor regime with our policy of non-recognition in Honduras and the Dominican Republic. The DCI suggested that some thought be given to communicating to the generals the idea that our recognition of the successor regime would follow more quickly if Vice President Tho were given the Presidency, thus preserving the constitutional character of the regime.

DCI Congressional Briefing

Briefings of Senators Russell and Saltonstall

In reporting on the coup then in progress and its effect on the war, the Director indicated that a structure had been built to prosecute the war and political events in the city had not yet significantly affected the war. It was not expected that the war would collapse because of the coup, noting it had not been the CIA view that the war would fail if Diem stayed in power.

November 6

DCI Congressional Briefing

CIA Subcommittee of House Appropriations

Regarding the specific circumstances of the coup, the Director noted that the political situation would have to be watched most carefully and inevitably there would be considerable confusion for a time. Nonspecific remarks were noted with regard to the general future situation. At that time it was not known what kind of new government would come forth.

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1963

November 21 Memorandum prepared
by H. Knoche

Notes on DCI Description of Honolulu Sessions (as covered in
the Morning Meeting, November 21)

In discussing the recent past with Lodge, DCI said Lodge regarded Deptel 243 as a clear order to upset the regime, and he referred to Richardson's cable shortly thereafter describing the fine prospects for a coup, followed by Richardson's contrary assessment a day later. Thus Lodge felt that Richardson had led him up the hill and then back down, and this incident, in DCI's view, was responsible to a great extent for the deterioration of relations between Lodge and Richardson. In fairness, Lodge however did make the point that Richardson had become far too visible and too much a symbol of past relationships and for these reasons, too, had to leave.

Harkins, in DCI's view, made a poor presentation. It was clear to all hands that the military situation is not at all rosy and is in fact as described by the Agency Task Force which prepared a memorandum for the DCI prior to his departure. The DCI said he returns more discouraged about South Vietnam than ever in the past, and he sensed that McNamara and Bundy have the same impression.

December 3 Personal letter from
Lodge to McCone

Lodge makes a plea to have David Smith appointed Chief of Station

December 6 State telegram to Saigon
Deptel 908

Informs Saigon that at a high-level meeting that day BGD
presented a disturbing analysis of the current military situation.

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December 6
(cont'd)

DCI Congressional Briefing

CIA Subcommittee of House Appropriations

The Director stated he was extremely worried about the situation in Vietnam, pointing out that the government of Vietnam could not get congealed and there was some discussion within the ruling forces. He commented there was not full rapport between the leaders and indicated that civilians were not fully brought into the government at the time. Those who had been brought in had unclear authority. The war effort had not been improved by the new government, and Viet Cong activities had increased. The DCI noted that his concern with the situation did not mean that it was in danger of going down the drain or that it was desperate. On the other hand, he indicated he saw little forward thrust. The DCI indicated that the US should not go in with its own forces and fight this war, that US strategy to train South Vietnamese to do their own fighting is sound. On the other hand, the US could not simply pull out of South Vietnam and should "play the hand out". With respect to the then current Vietnam leaders, it was indicated that many of them are responsible and with considerable abilities but reiterated there is evidence of developing tensions and rivalries.

December 7

CIA cable to Saigon
DIR 87710

Saigon is informed that Peer de Silva is appointed COS and David Smith to be DCOS

White House cable to Saigon
CAP 63633

The President informs Lodge of the de Silva appointment

".....It is of the first importance that there be the most complete understanding and cooperation between you and him..... I am concerned not only to sustain effective cooperation, but to avoid any mutterings in the press. I look to you all to ensure the complete absence of any backbiting and the establishment and maintenance of a relationship of genuine trust and understanding at all levels. I cannot overemphasize the importance which I personally attach to correcting the situation which has existed in Saigon in the past, and which I saw myself when I was out there."

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December 7
(cont'd)

CIA cable to Saigon
DIR 877H

DCI informs Lodge of de Silva's appointment and his expected ETA

"Acting on direction of Higher Authority I presently plan to arrive in Saigon on or about the morning of December 18 accompanied by Krulak, Colby, and de Silva. McNamara plans to arrive by separate means on December 19."

December 11

CIA cable to Saigon
DIR 88564

DCI replies to Lodge's letter of December 3 urging David Smith's appointment as COS

".....FYI my personal recommendation was that Dave continue as COS. However, I could not in honesty state that he was 'the most capable senior executive in the whole outfit,' and since this was the criterion placed on me by the President, there was no choice open but to assign Peer de Silva....."

December 12

Memorandum for DCI
from M. V. Forrestal

Forrestal's comments on transfer of CIA responsibilities to the military

".....When President Kennedy approved 'Operation Switchback' about a year ago, the concept was that all paramilitary operations of an overt nature in South Vietnam should be transferred from the Agency to MACV.....Although I do not believe it was ever set down on paper, those of us who participated in the discussions at the time felt that any cross border operations which might be in apparent violation of international custom or agreements should remain under the control of the Agency.....I think there are two essential requirements for any operation across the border of South Vietnam. The first is that such operations be disavowable.....The second is that they be subject to the most direct and rapid control from the highest political levels in our Government.....The transfer of these cross border operations to MACV, in my opinion, jeopardizes both of the requirements of covertness and control.....Cooperation between the Agency

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December 12 Memorandum for DCI
(cont'd) from M. V. Forrestal
(cont'd)

and State has been exemplary in this very delicate area. I do not think that the military chain of command will permit this kind of close supervision. . . . These views are purely personal, and I have not had an opportunity to discuss this matter with President Johnson. I do think, however, that they reflect the views of the people over here who were close to the problem when 'Operation Switchback' was being discussed."

December 13 CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 3085

Lodge cable replying to DCI's request that de Silva's cover be protected

" I certainly cannot take responsibility for keeping any man's name out of the press who works for the US government in Vietnam. . . . It is not clear to me what his cover is. In fact the whole arrangement is still somewhat obscure to me. . . . "

Memorandum for DCI from
CIA Vietnam Working Group

Conditions in Long An Province

"It would appear that security conditions in Long An Province have been unsatisfactory for some time. Although. . . there were some indications that the strategic hamlet program in the delta. . . was not progressing favorably, the thrust of official reports from Saigon did not convey the seriousness of the situation which now appears to have developed. . . . "

December 17 Memorandum for DCI from
A/COS, Saigon

Various Aspects of the Post-Coup Situation in South Vietnam

" the necessary potential leadership already exists in the junta in the person of Minh. . . . The. . . is a millstone around the neck of Minh and his early departure would be desirable. There is a very real possibility of a power split in the junta. . . . Civilian aspirations for more democratic rule are largely centered in the cities. . . . Long An is probably not typical of most other delta provinces but represents an extreme example

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- December 17** Memorandum for DCI from **of the problems the government faces in the delta. . . . The**
(cont'd) **A/COS, Saigon** **coup d'etat will probably result in a net improvement in the**
(cont'd) **(cont'd)** **performance of the military establishment, but our expecta-**
of the problems the government faces in the delta. . . . The
coup d'etat will probably result in a net improvement in the
performance of the military establishment, but our expecta-
tions should not be too high in view of the fact that we have
essentially the same group of officers as before. . . . "
- December 18-20** **Fact-finding mission to**
SVN which included McNamara,
DCI, M. Bundy, Sylvester,
Sullivan, & Colby
- December 20** **Memorandum of Conver-**
sation. Record by Spera **DCI's conference with Generals Khanh and Tri in Saigon**
- " In parting, General Khanh stated he had a single question for the Director: With the premise that if there would develop within South Vietnam a neutralist current, he, Khanh, and others will react very forcefully. Khanh asked whether he would receive US support. The Director replied that US policy remains that of standing by firmly to keep Vietnam free. "
- December 21** **Memorandum for the Record** **DCI's conference with General Harkins in Saigon, December 18**
Record by DCI.
- "Harkins stated that communications and relationship with Lodge were satisfactory, however, it was a 'one-way street' Intelligence on the success or failures in the war effort was not good and it was dependent upon the reports of provincial chiefs, many of whom had 'padded' their accounts for political or for other reasons. . . . With reference to the general situation, Harkins continued to be optimistic. He thought he had been badly misled in some regards, particularly the Long An Province. . . . He stated: 'This operation will be reduced to a police action after the middle of 1964.' I personally do not feel this optimistic, but it indicates the feeling of General Harkins at this time. . . . "

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December 21
(cont'd)Memorandum for the Record DCI discussion with Ambassador Lodge in Saigon on December 18
Record by DCI.

The purpose of the meeting was to introduce de Silva. DCI and the Ambassador then met privately. "With respect to the war effort, McCone stated that there was a failure of intelligence and this should be corrected. There was no excuse for the kind of reporting that we had gotten on the Long An Province; it was totally erroneous and Lodge agreed....."

Memorandum by DCI

Highlights of Discussions in Saigon, December 18-20

"There is no organized government in South Vietnam at this time..... It is abundantly clear that statistics received over the past year or more from the GVN officials and reported by the US mission on which we gauged the trend of the war were grossly in error..... It is my conclusion that the coup came when there was a downward trend which was more serious than was reported and, therefore, more serious than realized..... The military government may be an improvement over the Diem-Nhu regime, but this is not as yet established and the future of the war remains in doubt..... The political stability of the new government under the MRC is subject to serious doubt..... In my judgment, there are more reasons to doubt the future of the effort under present programs and moderate extensions to existing programs than there are reasons to be optimistic about the future of our cause in South Vietnam."

Memorandum for the
President from McNamaraSummary of McNamara's conclusions after his visit to Vietnam,
December 19-20

"The situation is very disturbing. Current trends, unless reversed in the next 2-3 months, will lead to neutralization at best and more likely to a Communist-controlled state..... The new government... is indecisive and drifting..... The Country Team lacks leadership, has been poorly informed, and is not

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**December 21 Memorandum for the
(cont'd) President from McNamara
(cont'd)**

working to a common plan. As to the grave reporting weaknesses, both Defense and CIA must take major steps to improve this. John McCone and I have discussed it and are acting vigorously in our respective spheres. . . . Viet Cong progress has been great during the period since the coup, with my best guess being that the situation has in fact been deteriorating in the countryside since July to a far greater extent than we realized because of our undue dependence on distorted Vietnamese reporting. . . . Possible neutralization of Vietnam is strongly opposed by Minh, and our attitude is somewhat suspect because of editorials in the US press. My appraisal may be overly pessimistic. Lodge, Harkins, and Minh would probably agree with me on specific points, but feel that January should see significant improvement. . . . "

**Presidential Meeting on
Vietnam. CIA participants:
DCI and C/FE. Record
by C/FE.**

McNamara's report to the President on his trip to Vietnam,
December 19-20; DCI's comments

McNamara gave an extensive report, closely following his written memorandum to the President. "One problem area the Secretary identified is the complete failure of reporting, for which DOD assumes its full measure of responsibility, which Mr. McCone said that CIA also accepts. Steps are being taken to remedy this situation, but the depth of our lack of knowledge of the true situation is now coming to light. . . . Mr. McCone stated that he might not be quite as pessimistic as Secretary McNamara about the overall situation, but that he also foresaw more reasons for concern as to the outcome than not. He stated that the answer cannot be found in additional US strength, as the Vietnamese themselves must carry the main burden. He particularly pointed out that we must improve the intelligence and that the CIA station must insure that the situation is covered and not limit its efforts to the Viet Cong Movement. . . . Secretary McNamara stated that his hopes were in an improvement in leadership by General Minh, but Mr. McCone stated that another coup or even another thereafter might occur in Vietnam."

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December 23 Memorandum for the President from DCI

DCI's written comment on McNamara's December 21 report on Vietnam

DCI refers to a separate memorandum which was left with M. Bundy earlier in which his observations were recorded. "There is no substantive difference between Secretary McNamara and myself except perhaps I feel a little less pessimistic than he. Nevertheless...there are more reasons to be pessimistic than to be optimistic about prospects of our success in South Vietnam.....I am dispatching to Saigon a number of our 'old South Vietnamese hands' for temporary duty to assist in developing the necessary covert resources of native case officers and agents to inform us concerning the effectiveness of the MRC and the public acceptance of the new government. This has not been CIA's role in the past, as intelligence of this type has come through military channels. However I believe the next few months are so critical that information covertly developed will complement reporting received through the other channels....."

1964

January 6 General Minh signed a series of decrees that placed the country under virtual control of himself and two other senior generals.

January 27 SecDef Congressional Briefing

Closed session of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on US military commitments throughout the world

McNamara said (according to press reports) that the Viet Cong had "made considerable progress" since the coup. He said that the US still hoped to withdraw most of its troops before the end of 1965.

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January 27-30 Events leading up to General Khanh's successful coup, which began early morning January 30

The sequence of events cannot be developed from a chronological listing of reporting, because none of those reporting had the complete story until after the event. The source documents used in compiling this part of the chronology are listed at left.

CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 4093. January 28

State telegram from Saigon
No. 1431. January 29

State telegram from Saigon
No. 1432. January 30

State telegram from Saigon
No. 1433. January 30

Harkins cable to Taylor
MAC 0325. January 30

CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 4132. January 30

CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 4154. January 30

De Silva Memorandum for
Colby. January 31

Late morning, January 27 (from de Silva memo): De Silva learned through an emissary from Khanh that Khanh wanted to see de Silva in Danang on January 28. De Silva instructed that Khanh be told that de Silva had an important prior commitment in Saigon for January 28 but would go to Danang either January 29 or 30 or would send Conein. Khanh's emissary said "it would be better to forget the whole thing."

Afternoon, January 27 (from de Silva memo): De Silva told the Ambassador of the approach and the response to be given Khanh.

1500 hours, January 28 (from MAC 0325): Harkins first learned of the coup plotting when Col. Wilson visited him at the direction of Khanh. Harkins told Wilson to go immediately to the Embassy and relate his story to the Ambassador. In the meantime, Harkins checked with CIA to see if they had any pertinent information.

1630 hours, January 28 (from de Silva memo): Two officers from MACV J-2 came to de Silva's office and told him of the developing situation reported by Col. Wilson. De Silva prepared SAIG 4093, showed it to the Ambassador at 1830 hours, and sent it immediately thereafter.

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January 27-30
(cont'd)

1910 hours, January 28 (file time of SAIG 4093): General Khanh told Col. Wilson, Senior MACG adviser for I Corps, that he had information that another coup would be attempted, possibly as early as January 31, by pro-French, pro-neutralist generals. Once the coup was successfully carried out, its perpetrators would immediately call for the neutralization of South Vietnam.

1915 hours, January 28 (from de Silva memo): De Silva conferred with Khanh's emissary and asked that an appointment be arranged for de Silva to see Khanh in Saigon on January 29.

Morning, January 29 (from de Silva memo): De Silva informed Lodge of de Silva's plans to see Khanh. Later than morning Lodge called de Silva in and directed that he was not to see Khanh. De Silva arranged to get word to Khanh that de Silva was sick in bed and would be unable to make the meeting with Khanh, which was set for 1900 hours, January 29.

1630 hours, January 29 (from de Silva memo): De Silva asked the Ambassador's office if there were any results yet from a meeting scheduled for that day between Khanh and Col. Wilson. De Silva was told that Wilson had not yet reported in to the Embassy.

Afternoon, January 29 (from MAC 0325): Harkins met with Lodge and was informed of Wilson's latest meeting with Khanh. The result was Embtel 1431, which was coordinated with Harkins, but not with de Silva.

1830 hours, January 29 (from de Silva memo): De Silva was called to the Ambassador's office and was informed that the Ambassador had already seen Wilson, had written a telegram, and that de Silva would get a copy. De Silva left and went home.

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January 27-30
(cont'd)

2049 hours, January 29 (file time of Embtel 1431): ".....Khanh is profoundly disturbed by his expectation of a strong move towards neutralism by the government, which he thinks will take place either tomorrow or Friday /The 30th or 31st/. He thinks if it is not vigorously crushed, it might succeed.....He wants US assurance that we are opposed to neutralism.....He wants to use Col. Wilson as his exclusive contact with us and has asked Wilson to stay in Saigon..... Wilson said that Khanh's absolute refusal to deal with any American other than Wilson is due to an unfortunate experience 'with a CIA representative named Spera, before the Oct. 31 coup'..... Am limiting knowledge of this to Harkins and de Silva..... Khanh is contacting Wilson again later today, so there may be more to report..... Harkins has seen this message and agrees."

0215 hours, January 30 (from MAC 0325): Harkins reports: ".....Mr. Dunn asked to come by as he had some more dope. Dunn told me 0400 local today (30th) was H-hour..... I suggested letting Washington know immediately however was informed Ambassador did not want to send msg. at that time."

0315 hours, January 30 (file time of Embtel 1432): "Gen. Khanh has informed us through his contact, Col. Wilson, that he together with Generals Phat and Khiam intend to move at 0400 this morning to secure changes in the composition of the MRC. General Khanh states that General Minh has been informed of this move and agrees. The only definite statement we have yet is that Premier Tho must go....."

0315 hours, January 30 (from MAC 0325): Harkins directed Weede to go to Embassy and suggest getting word on the wire. Upon arrival at Embassy, Weede found msg. had already been filed. (Embtel 1432)

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January 27-30
(cont'd)

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0335 hours, January 30 (from de Silva memo): The Embassy called de Silva at home and asked him to report to the Embassy. Upon arriving, de Silva read a copy of Embtel 1432. Dunn told de Silva that Col. Wilson had reported this information at about 0030 hours and that Embtel 1432 had been sent at 0315 hours. At 0425 hours, while de Silva was still in Dunn's office, Col. Wilson called and reported that the coup was under way.

0500 hours, January 30 (file time of Embtel 1433): "..... Col. Wilson... reports... that at 0435 operation is on schedule and that JGS compound has been secured....."

1000 hours, January 30 (file time of SAIG 4132): "By now you have seen Ambassador Lodge's telegram to Department, No. 1431. Want you to know that I first saw this telegram at 0430 hours on 30 Jan, after coup action had begun and until then had in no way been informed of information contained in that telegram....."

2257 hours, 30 January (file time of SAIG 4154): De Silva forwards to Headquarters the verbatim text of Embtel 1431. (Note: The Secretary of State had sent a loan copy of Embtel 1431 to the DCI's office on the morning of January 30.)

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February 13

**Memorandum for the DCI
from Colby & Cooper**

"South Vietnam - A Proposal"

"..... The primary doctrine espoused by the US and GVN has been offensive, to seek out the Viet Cong enemy in order to fix and destroy him. This is essentially the same doctrine applied by the French forces in Indo-China. An additional drag on the conduct of the counterinsurgency effort has been the American tendency to create elaborate, coordinated plans and inter-acting staffs. This has resulted in an over-emphasis on the machinery at the expense of its objective. The objective of this war... is to motivate and help the villagers to resist the Viet Cong. Thus, the guiding doctrine would appear to be defensive, not offensive. The villagers can be enlisted for their own defense, but will not join an offensive action. The Viet Cong... effort against the strategic hamlets... coincided with the tendency toward regularizing and turning into offensive patrols the irregular forces turned over under Project SWITCHBACK. It may now be too late to resume the defensive and irregular approach to the war in Vietnam. It appears essential, however, to make such an effort in order to avoid a repetition of the French experience."

February 20

**State telegram from Saigon
No. 1594**

Lodge urges pressure against North Vietnam

"For the President from Lodge. I believe various pressures can and should be applied to North Vietnam to cause them to cease and desist from their murderous intrusion into South Vietnam. In light of recent terrorism against Americans in Saigon, I believe North Vietnam should be told secretly that every terrorist act against Americans in South Vietnam will provoke swift retaliation against North Vietnam."

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February 25 Draft Memorandum for the President from the Secretary of State

"Stabilizing the Situation in Southeast Asia"

The paper sets forth a series of actions intended to disabuse the Communists of the impression they may have an opportunity for broad, forward movement, discourage them from attempting further advance in Laos, and give them reason to believe the US is prepared to escalate the conflict in order to defend its positions in Southeast Asia and reverse the recent course of developments.

The paper essentially recommends that the President authorize the Secretaries of State and Defense to carry out parts of Phase II of the program of graduated actions contained in NSAM 256 of July 31, 1963. It is made clear that a delegation of authority only is requested... and that it is not intended to implement actions at this time.

With respect to actions to be undertaken outside of Laos, the most significant are the deployment of additional US combat forces to Thailand and the movement of an aircraft carrier group to the coast of South Vietnam. In addition, certain diplomatic actions are proposed which, in effect, consist of bringing our friends into our confidence and gaining their support for these actions and warning our opponents of the seriousness of our purpose.

February 24 Meeting at the State Dept.
CIA participant: Mr. Myers,
Record by C/FE.

Meeting on State's proposed action paper on Laos

"It was agreed to revamp the objectives of the State Department draft on what the movement of US forces to northeast Thailand was expected to accomplish so that the JCS could decide what was required....." (Note: This meeting was for the purpose of discussing the draft memorandum which appeared under date of February 25. See preceding entry.)

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March 3

"Memorandum on Vietnam"
prepared by C/FE

Memorandum transmitted to Saigon for DCI use during fact-
finding mission beginning March 8

"Following my trip to Saigon in late December, 1963, I concluded that... there were more reasons to be pessimistic... than there were reasons to be optimistic.... The military situation, bad in December, has worsened and the problem of reversing the trend is formidable.... The various units which were trained for the purpose of defending their own strategic hamlets should be used in this way.... Intelligence has been spotty. There has been submersion of bad news and an over-statement of good news.... I conclude that our military operations in South Vietnam have not been as successful as we assumed up to last December. I think the whole concept has to be reviewed.... With these steps /discussed in the memorandum/ we should be able to strengthen the Khanh government enough to permit us to decide whether continuance along that line will be adequate to defeat the Viet Cong or whether these steps must be supplemented by operations against North Vietnam. In the absence of these steps, operations against North Vietnam would in any case not likely be worth the cost...."

March 4

SNIE 14. 3-64

"The Outlook for North Vietnam"

"We believe that the North Vietnamese leaders look at Communist prospects with considerable confidence. In South Vietnam, they probably feel that GVN will resist is wanting and may feel that the same is true of the US. They may seek to speed the process by a step-up in current Viet Cong tactics of pressure and terror. We think Hanoi will stop short of introducing sizable DRV military units into South Vietnam, lest this bring about a major US military retaliation."

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March 8

**Fact-finding mission
arrives in Saigon. Included:
McNamara, Taylor, Sylvester,
McGene, W. Bundy, & Sullivan**

**Memorandum prepared by
Intelligence Survey Team**

**(This is the group of CIA
"old South Vietnamese
hands" which the DCI
mentions being sent to
Vietnam TDY in his
memorandum to the
President December 23.)**

Record of the survey team's report to Lodge on March 8

"[The Ambassador said] it was gratifying to him to know that the US has an agency which could assemble such a highly qualified and experienced team, place it into a complex area like Vietnam, and produce such a comprehensive picture of the situation." Items discussed included the following: (1) Absence of top-level GVN policy directives and guidance on major counterinsurgency programs; (2) Need for more effective political advice to GVN; (3) Need for the government to create a political base; (4) Existence of islands of strength which should be fully supported; (5) General attitudes of apathy... and fear of the VC among the rural populace; (6) Need for bolstering the military's awareness of the political aspects of the VC insurgency--relative ineffectiveness and lack of follow-through in psywar, civic action and political operations; (7) Tendency toward "conventionalization" of Special Forces... need for reorientation of all military operations toward unconventional operations; (8) Concentration by the military on "combat" intelligence; (9) The team's conclusion that despite the grim situation, the war can be won if the problems are adequately recognized and deliberate action taken to solve them one-by-one.

March 9

**Memorandum prepared by
the DCI**

Questions from the briefings and presentations on March 8

"The conclusions of the CIA Special Team. This team was sent here to (1) determine, based on their extensive experience and covert contacts in SVN, on a 'spot check' basis, the situation throughout SVN... (2) to establish covert contacts

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March 9
(cont'd)

Memorandum prepared by
the DCI
(cont'd)

throughout SVN who could and would provide intelligence in the future. . . . The events leading up to the January 30 coup are not clear. Col. Wilson had a clear signal from Khanh on January 27 (?) in Da Nang when he said - 'Go to Saigon and determine if your government will support an anti-neutral government or will go along with a neutral government.' The answer that we would support only an 'anti-neutral' government was passed to Khanh before he left Da Nang. This was a clear indication that Khanh meant action. Why was it not reported by MACV, Lodge, or CAS not informed? The remaining scenario of events leaves doubt as to whether we were alert to the indicators, analyzed them for their effect on US policy and attempted to direct them. Also, why was the COS excluded from the play even after the Lodge reporting telegram went out?"

DCI's Notes

Briefing at MACV Conference Room

" Gen. Harkins states that there had been no effective government since August or September of 1963. . . . He said it was hard to say whether we were winning or losing. He described his outlook as one of 'guarded optimism.' The meeting was confronted with conflicting statistics and views and question was raised by General Taylor and Secretary McNamara, 'Does MACV see CINCPAC and Washington estimates Conversely, where do Washington and CINCPAC get the facts on which they make their estimates?'"

DCI's Notes

Meeting at U.S. Embassy - DCI, 14 members of the Intelligence Survey Team, W. Bundy, and Sullivan

" Mr. Colby pointed out a change in concept from mobile local forces to conventional forces with static defense perimeters. Opinion was offered that the oil spot program would have been a good thing two years ago but that now the

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March 9
(cont'd)

DCI's notes
(cont'd)

Delta was almost gone and we were now facing our 'last chance.'
.....The Montagnard units were reported to have been consolidated into conventional units of the Vietnamese special forces with the resulting loss of 80% in intelligence operations and 100% in offensive operations....."

March 11

Memorandum prepared for the DCI while he was in Saigon

"Stability of the Khanh government"

".....It is our judgment that the Khanh Government gives enough promise of stability within the next six months for us to bet on it and, since it evidences the will to follow policies in consonance with ours, it deserves our full support....."

March 14

Memorandum for the President from Secretary McNamara

McNamara's report on his fact-finding mission to Vietnam

".....The military tools and concepts of the GVN/US effort are generally sound and adequate..... Substantial reductions in the numbers of US military training personnel should be possible before the end of 1965..... The situation has unquestionably been growing worse, at least since September..... Large groups of the population are now showing signs of apathy and indifference, and there are some signs of frustration within the US contingent..... In the last 90 days the weakening of the government's position has been particularly noticeable..... There is a constant threat of assassination or of another coup..... The young Khanh government needs the reinforcement of some significant success against the North..... If the Khanh Government can stay in power and the [recommended] actions can be carried out rapidly, it is my judgment that the situation in South Vietnam can be significantly improved in the next four to six months....."

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April 16

DCI Congressional Briefing CIA Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee

The Director indicated that the situation in South Vietnam was not good and that there are more reasons to be pessimistic than optimistic. On the favorable side he pointed out that Khanh has shown potential sagacity and has a substantial government. But on the unfavorable side he pointed out that over the last six months the Viet Cong have stepped up their attacks and increased their military effectiveness. In addition, the Viet Cong are taking actions in the political and civic action fields and today control larger areas. Consequently, the people are getting discouraged and more apathetic.

April 17-20

Secretary Rusk visited South Vietnam to emphasize US support to Premier Khanh and his regime's war against the Viet Cong.

April 24

Secretary McNamara indicated at a press conference that the administration had amended its plans to withdraw most US military personnel from South Vietnam by the end of 1965.

May 4

State telegram from Saigon No. 2108

Khanh asks Lodge if he should put the country on a war footing

Khanh asked Lodge's view on putting the country on a war footing. He suggested an announcement be made to Hanoi that any further interference in South Vietnam's internal affairs would lead to reprisals. He said he could not enthuse about just "making the agony endure" and could not see the logic of taking heavy casualties simply in order to stand still.

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May 5

Memorandum prepared by
W. H. Sullivan

"High Level Talking Paper for Canadians"

".....It is imperative that our communication with Hanoi be made precise at this time and we know of no other channel than the Canadians to bring this about. A quick trip by Mac Bundy [for discussions with the Canadians] is also indicated. He should be prepared to spell out the President's feeling that: (1) we cannot afford to lose Southeast Asia; (2) we are now in serious danger of such a loss; and (3) that he must, if necessary, be prepared to go to Congress to seek their consent to using whatever means are required to bring a halt to North Vietnamese aggression....."

State telegram to Saigon
Deptel 1838

Rusk asks further details on Lodge's report of Khanh's seeming despair (Embtel 2108)

".....What is your assessment of Khanh's motivations?..... Do you detect any pique?..... Has he reached the conclusion that he cannot successfully win the war in the South unless he undertakes military action against the North?..... Does he want to move now regardless of progress in the South?..... It becomes most important to us to know whether this conversation represented an accumulation of frustrations... or whether it is a forced effort to determine the ultimate US intentions....."

May 6

State telegram from Saigon
No. 2125

Lodge's reply to Rusk's questions in Deptel 1838

"I believe Khanh is thinking much as any professional soldier would think whose whole training is to get a victory as expeditiously as possible. I do not detect any pique. I think he honestly is trying to answer the questions in his own mind....."

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1964**May 11**

Memorandum of Conversation Lodge/Sullivan talks in Saigon re pressure on North Vietnam prepared by W. H. Sullivan

"..... There should be a steady escalation of the clandestine operations... under Plan 34-A. At an appropriate point, he believed these operations should include air strikes..... They should be disavowed entirely by both the Vietnamese and the Americans..... He would expect the Canadians to tell the North Vietnamese there would be retaliatory action against the North on a tit-for-tat basis..... They could expect this sort of action so long as they harassed South Vietnam..... I said that my discussions with Secretary Rusk and Bill Bundy did not indicate to me that there was meeting of the minds on this whole approach....."

May 12-13

McNamara and Taylor were in Saigon on another fact-finding mission.

May 12

CIA cable to Saigon DIR 20682

DCI cable to Colby, then in Saigon, expressing DCI's concern that we may not have an accurate picture of Vietnamese situation

"I am deeply concerned that the situation in South Vietnam may be deteriorating to a greater extent than we realize..... I am not satisfied that the sum total of all... indicators have been evaluated and the consequences to the US position clearly appraised..... I am concerned that [the enemy] could possibly develop a capability to strike with both surprise and unexpected power..... I wish you to analyze the situation before leaving especially as to whether intelligence reporting from us and Vietnamese intelligence services and US Mission analysis is providing proper appreciation of actual situation in Vietnam....."

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May 13**CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 6316****Colby's reply to the concern expressed by the DCI in DIR 20682**

"I fully share your deep concern about the situation here. . . . Despite the brave words at the top, the situation is continuing to deteriorate in the country and the top itself is on very thin ice. I believe that Secretary McNamara has identified that there is a substantial problem; whether he fully appreciates how serious it is I am not so sure. . . . I believe that all of the critical facts are available and are being reported but there is considered need for frequent and objective overall appraisals of their significance. . . . I am concerned primarily at a tendency toward chasing wills-of-the-wisp rather than cleaving firmly to a fundamental strategy for this war. The community here, the advisers in the country and the Vietnamese are submerged under a flood of variegated programs, requirements for specific statistical reporting on everything from fertilizer to the 'percentage of Viet Cong wounded who later die' and frequent high-level visitations which completely preempt the time and effort of the key people. All these clearly reduce the small number of man-hours available to carry out any fundamental strategy for this war."

May 14**State telegram to Saigon
No. 1942****The President asks for Lodge's views on pressure on NVN**

"McNamara and Sullivan reported regarding their conversations with you. I was particularly struck by Sullivan's report of his conversation with you in which you indicated your concept of a strategy for moving against the North. . . . I consider it vital that you and I at all times fully and clearly understand each other's minds and would therefore greatly appreciate it if you would send me urgently your precise present recommendations with respect to the North including the Canadian aspect, the timing, and the degree of visible US participation at each stage. . . ."

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May 19

DCI Congressional Briefing CIA Subcommittees of the Senate Armed Services and Senate Appropriations Committees

The Director stated that since Khanh took over the government in Saigon he has shown considerable leadership and political sagacity. However, he has a number of problems involving a number of leaders in the government, leaders of the military and the provincial chiefs and heads of the four Corps areas. The Director noted there were bureaucratic rivalries and some of the civilian ministers feel they do not have sufficient authority. "Hence, in my judgment, there are more reasons to doubt the future under present programs and moderate extensions to existing programs (i. e., harassing sabotage against NVN, border crossings, etc.) than there are reasons to be optimistic about the future of our course in South Vietnam."

May 21

Memorandum for M. Bundy
from W. H. Sullivan

Sullivan suggests a massive integration of US and SVN efforts

"..... The various programs which the Vietnamese have laid out for themselves and which we in turn have laid upon them... have placed more stress upon the fragile framework of the Vietnamese Government than it can stand. There is a greater stress on the far reaches of the distribution system in Vietnam than that system is currently prepared to handle. Above all, on both the American and the Vietnamese side, there is a vast need for a coordinated executive direction. This could be accomplished either by separate and parallel US and GVN management teams which would oversee the entire military and civilian effort... or it could be an integrated operation moving Americans directly into Vietnamese ministries."

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May 15

**State telegram from Saigon
No. 2212**

Lodge replies to the President's request in Deptel 1942

".....I think the Canadian interlocutor on his first trip to Hanoi should state that the Americans are utterly determined to win the struggle in South Vietnam and will do whatever is necessary to win it. If prior to the Canadian's trip to Hanoi there has been a terroristic act of the proper magnitude, then I suggest that a specific target in North Vietnam be considered as a prelude to his arrival. I much prefer a selective use of Vietnamese air power to an over US effort."

May 18

**Memorandum for the
President from W. P. Bundy**

"Possible Action Against North Vietnam"

".....Secretary McNamara, Mr. McCone and I are setting down in this memorandum our thinking. We all agree that a decision may be required considerably sooner than we had hoped over the past three months. Khanh has not put the fabric of political life together again successfully and the security front is precarious. Reluctant as we may be to hit the North with the base in Vietnam as precarious as it is, we have to ask ourselves whether we can expect the base to become firmer in the next few months. Since early March, a select group... has been working on a possible sequence of actions to be followed if a decision were taken to hit the North. A political scenario was prepared and submitted to the JCS in late April. The next stage would be a careful intelligence judgment of exactly how North Vietnam, Communist China, and Soviet Russia would respond to the kind of precise and graduated actions laid out in the scenario. Initiation of air attacks and aerial mining... would have to be on an acknowledged basis. The chances are at least 50-50... that in the absence of action against North Vietnam, both Vietnam and Laos would deteriorate by the latter part of this year to a point where they would be very difficult to save."

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May 21

**Memorandum by Colby
and Cooper**

"A Program for Laos and South Vietnam"

"To meet the current Communist threat... essentially two extreme courses of action are now being discussed: (a) salvaging what we can by negotiations at Geneva; or (b) carrying the war directly to Hanoi. Whatever the advantages of either course... the risks... are so high as to warrant a searching examination of yet another alternative. We call this... 'massive counterinsurgency.' In brief, what is proposed is that the defense and stabilization of the situation... be accomplished by a substantial change in the nature of the counterinsurgency program and certain substantial increases in its scale. This to be supplemented by intense psychological warfare pressures and selected military action... against the Communists in South Vietnam and Laos as well as in North Vietnam....."

**State telegram to Saigon
No. 2027**

Rusk asks for Lodge's views on what might be done to improve conditions in South Vietnam

"Situation in Southeast Asia is clearly moving toward basic decisions both in the Free World and in the communist world..... I am convinced that the American people will do what has to be done if there is something to support. The prospect that we might strike the North... only to lose the South is uninviting. We need your judgment as to what more can be done to achieve both the reality and appearance of greater solidarity in South Vietnam to improve the actual administrative performance of the government itself in grappling with its awesome problems....."

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May 22

State telegram from Saigon
No. 2284Lodge replies to Rusk's query in Deptel 2027

".....the question clearly arises as to whether our 'advisory' phase is not about played out and whether the US will not have to move into a position of actual control. This time has clearly not arrived yet, but it may be approaching..... The question of going further... involves the whole question of whether we shall shift from a basis of being advisory to that of being actually in control..... It does not seem to me that it can possibly work for us to compel them to install American advisors..... At this moment, I personally cannot think of 'further incentives', but I do not doubt that some could be found..... I wonder whether the Americans should not give up 'business as usual' atmosphere in Saigon, with its lavish cocktail parties and black tie dinners..... Also, the luxury items at our commissary (which are not available to Vietnamese) do not give a sense of urgency."

State telegram to Saigon
No. 2049Rusk's views on Lodge's proposal for use of the Canadians

"..... We tend to see real difficulty in approaching the Canadians at this time with any message as specific as you suggest; i. e., that Hanoi be told by the Canadians 'that they will be punished'..... On the other question, whether initial substantial attacks could be left without acknowledgement, it is our present view here that this would simply not be feasible....."

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May 24

White House Meeting.
 President absent.
 CIA participants: DCL,
 C/FE, & Cooper.
 Record by C/FE.

Planning for direct action against North Vietnam

The meeting was devoted to wide-ranging discussion of political and military actions that might be taken in Laos and Vietnam. The most significant portion related to Vietnam is this: "The discussion then reverted to the critical question whether there was a positive need to act against North Vietnam. Mr. Ball felt that it was clear that the current action in South Vietnam is not adequate but that to carry the war to North Vietnam brings many imponderables in its wake, to wit, whether this will really help in South Vietnam and whether it may entail substantial dangers to South Vietnam. Mr. McNamara felt that we are continuing to lose the war in South Vietnam and nothing now in process will reverse this trend. Rusk... suggested that it is necessary to improve the situation in South Vietnam as much as possible. Mr. McNamara felt that if it were shown to be necessary to act in North Vietnam we should do it now, but that if this were not entirely clear he felt that we could go along for six to twelve weeks endeavoring to stiffen South Vietnam but then be prepared to move on to North Vietnam...."

May 25

SNIE 50-2-64

"Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos"

"ASSUMPTIONS. The actions to be taken... would begin with GVN (US-assisted) operations against the DRV... and might subsequently involve overt US military actions.

"CONCLUSIONS. If... the scale of attacks broadened... we are unable to set any meaningful odds for the course North Vietnam's leaders would adopt... though we incline to the view that they would lower their terms for a negotiated outcome.... There would nevertheless be a significant danger that they would fight.... Communist China almost certainly would not wish to become involved in hostilities with US forces...."

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May 25
(cont'd)Memorandum to the
President from
McGeorge Bundy"Basic Recommendation and Projected Course of Action on
Southeast Asia"

"It is recommended that you make a Presidential decision that the U.S. will use selected and carefully graduated military force against North Vietnam; that our clear purpose in this decision should be to use all our influence to bring about a major reduction or elimination of North Vietnamese interference in Laos and in South Vietnam; and not to unroll a scenario aimed at the use of force as an end in itself; that in the execution of this decision all separate elements of the problem . . . should be treated as parts of a single problem-- the protection of Southeast Asia from further Communist encroachment. It is the hope and best estimate of most of your advisers that a decision of this kind can be executed without bringing a major military reply from Red China, and still less from the Soviet Union. . . ."

Discussion of pros and cons of action against North Vietnam

". The President, throughout the evening, expressed impatience that we had not reached a conclusion as to the course of action to be followed. . . . I stated that I felt we must be extremely careful about action in North Vietnam. . . . [because] it might unleash forces which could readily overcome the friendly forces in both Laos and South Vietnam, with the result that we would 'lose our base' in Southeast Asia. This view was supported by Bundy and recognized by the President. . . . McNamara insisted, throughout the evening, that any action against North Vietnam must anticipate the commitment of at least seven Divisions in Southeast Asia. . . . I took issue with this point, stating that in my opinion (which was strictly non-professional and not supported by any studies) air attack would be more decisive than this indicated and possibly conclusive. I furthermore said that if any action involved the commitment of troops to combat in South Vietnam, we had better forget it

Presidential Meeting on
Southeast Asia. CIA
participant: DCL. Record
by DCL.

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May 25
(cont'd)

Presidential Meeting on
Southeast Asia. CIA
participant: DCL. Record
by DCL.
(cont'd)

because the American people and the Congress would not support such an action under any condition. . . . Throughout the evening the President inquired as to whether all possible was being done in South Vietnam. The answer was affirmative and I did not take issue with this. . . . The President then summarized the course of action he desired to follow about as follows: If /other actions/ failed, then we should prepare for action against North Vietnam on carefully selected targets. . . . If this involved a positioning of troops and other actions, then we should be prepared to take such actions. . . ."

May 27

Memorandum re Operation
SWITCHBACK prepared by
C/FE

DCI talking paper for the June meetings in Honolulu

"Between 1 July and 1 December 1963, control of virtually all of CIA's paramilitary operations were turned over to the U. S. Military establishment under the terms of Operation SWITCHBACK. . . . During the period of CIA administration these programs made steady progress toward extending GVN control over people and territories formerly held by the VC. The major emphasis. . . was directed at programs to win the support of the population. . . . Using this formula. . . these programs made steady but unspectacular progress and were considered to have been generally successful. . . . Following turnover of these programs to US Military control, they suffered steady loss of momentum. Political relationships with the local military and civilian authorities deteriorated. There was a considerably heavier emphasis on the military aspects of the program and the military concepts of action apparently changed from the original objective of winning population and territories from the VC to aggressive patrol actions against the guerrillas. . . . Most of the territory which had been recovered by these activities in the days of CIA control has now reverted to the VC. . . ."

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May 27
(cont'd)

State telegram to Saigon
No. 2095

Directs that Lodge and staff be prepared to discuss "interlanding" concept at Honolulu meetings, June 1 & 2

The Department informs the Ambassador that Washington has been considering improving the South Vietnamese effort by introducing American assistants into the political and military structure at the provincial and perhaps district level. "In order to test the utility of such a proposal, we would suggest that seven provinces be chosen for this purpose." The Department instructs the Ambassador to be prepared to discuss this proposal at the Honolulu meetings and requests that Khanh not be told of Washington's thinking on the matter.

Draft Memorandum for the
USIB. Prepared by BNE
with help of a panel
(DIA and INR).

"New Estimative Questions Concerning US Course of Action
re Vietnam"

"The assumptions with which we worked [in SNIE 59-2-64] envisaged fairly limited US force deployments. Had we understood that a major US force of, say, several divisions, might be involved, we would have altered the estimate in several important ways..... Large-scale US force deployment... would tend to convey precisely what it was not supposed to, that the US was resolved to transform the struggle... into a war... in which the survival of the DRV regime would be at stake..... China would take more steps to insure its own security, but we doubt that it would run much greater risks than indicated in the SNIE..... The USSR would doubtless take a more active role than indicated in the SNIE..... The greater US action would have ambiguous effects in South Vietnam..... A large-scale deployment of force would be more likely to convey an unlimited than a limited purpose..... We believe that bringing to bear lesser rather than greater power is realistic, perhaps the more realistic course, insofar as any course can be realistic in what is altogether a very bad situation....."

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May 28

Memorandum prepared for
the DCI by C/FE"A Recommended Program of Action for South Vietnam"

The memorandum, which was submitted to the DCI shortly before he left for the June meetings in Honolulu, recommended a comprehensive program of action for South Vietnam. Included among its recommendations were: a shift of emphasis to territorial or localized strategy; an injection of a sense of urgency through institution of martial law; various offensive actions, including hot pursuit; and all possible Free World third country involvement.

Memorandum for the DCI
from the General Counsel"Violations of the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Protocols on South Vietnam and Laos"

The General Counsel's opinion, which this memorandum summarizes, resulted from consideration of using information derived from SIGINT sources to prove publicly that the DRV had violated the Geneva protocols. The General Counsel felt that the 1954 Geneva Agreement on Vietnam was so completely outmoded that it was difficult to relate it to the present situation. He felt that the 1962 Protocol on Laos was still pertinent but that the intercept material demonstrating violations by the DRV did not have sufficient probative value to support a propaganda attack by the US. He further observed: "While I am outside my field, I would hazard a guess that the damage to intelligence would outweigh the benefits to be derived from a US attack on North Vietnam's violations of the Laos Protocol." This view is supported by other more highly classified documents written by NSA and CIA officers.

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June 3

Memorandum for the
Record Prepared by DCI"Observations and Agreed Actions at Honolulu Meetings,
1 and 2 June"

".....In closed meetings the views expressed by both Lodge and Westmoreland were, if anything, more optimistic than the view expressed in the larger meeting. I took exception to the optimistic view, stating the opinion that the downward spiral would continue, that dissension was a greater threat than was expressed, that unwillingness to work for a common cause and not setting aside 'politics as usual' was hurting Khanh by depriving him of useful assistance. I questioned whether things 'would jog along and improvements be seen' throughout the year. I raised the question of the effectiveness of the ARVN, noting the '2% contact rate' and warned that although a dramatic victory by the SVN would be buoying; likewise, a dramatic victory by the VC...would have a demoralizing effect. I stated that possible events, such as the death of Khanh, a major Catholic-Buddhist incident and the like would break the fragile cohesion that Khanh had developed. I further stated that there was evidence of the erosion of the will of the people to resist. This was due to the war, not the political changes and shifts of command. In short, I was more pessimistic than the spokesmen from Saigon....." Lodge and Westmoreland violently opposed encadrement and interlarding. The plan was dropped. Bombing NVN was discussed. "McNamara, Rusk and I all are in agreement that we must prepare for extreme contingencies, even though we consider them improbable. Hence, agreeing to bombing to the north at any level involves possible commitment of troops to action in Southeast Asia. Stationing of troops would not be enough. This would require a joint resolution of Congress and it was agreed that an act precedent to bombing the north would be the securing of such a joint resolution....."

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June 5

Memorandum of
Conversation between
W. Bundy and Denis
Greenhill, British
Embassy

"Current Southeast Asia Situation"

".....Mr. Bundy said that the following was the status as a result of Honolulu and other events since Mr. Bundy's visit to London:..... The readings on South Vietnam at Honolulu had been a 'shade less pessimistic' than those on which we were basing our thinking of a week ago. Nonetheless, the situation remained serious. We were now likely to take at least ten days to two weeks to refine our thinking before we attempted to reach any basic decisions. We were also continuing to place great stress on diplomatic and information activities that would make clear that we were prepared to negotiate just as far as possible before taking other action. As to the Canadian gambit with Hanoi, Mr. Seaborn would arrive in Hanoi probably about the 8th or 9th, carrying a general message of the firmness of our resolve but also that our objective was solely to get Hanoi out of Laos and Vietnam and not to destroy the DRV or remove its regime....."

June 8

Memorandum written by
Willard Matthias of the
Board of National Estimates

"Trends in the World Situation"

This memorandum was actually written in February 1964. The Official Use Only version appeared under date of June 8. Sherman Kent's transmittal memorandum, dated June 9, notes that the paper "has general Board approval, though no attempt has been made to reach complete agreement on every point of it." The paper says with respect to Vietnam: "There remains serious doubt that victory can be won, and the situation remains very fragile. If large-scale US support continues and if further political deterioration within South Vietnam is prevented, at least a prolonged stalemate can be attained. There is also a chance that political evolution within the country and developments upon the world scene could lead to some kind of negotiated settlement based upon neutralization."

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June 8
(cont'd)

Memorandum for the
DCI prepared by the
General Counsel.

"Legal Aspects of the Southeast Asia Situation"

".....the 1954 Protocol on Vietnam is in effect no longer operative and therefore does not constitute either a basis for action or restriction on action..... there is a serious domestic problem in taking increasingly militant steps without any specific congressional approval.....having prepared an appropriate Joint Resolution it is up to the President to decide if and when it should be put before the Congress..... a meaningful Joint Resolution could not be obtained in this election year and the President is going to have to take the steps he thinks are necessary without this technical backing by the Congress....." / Note: This memorandum arose out of concern over the problem of armed escorts for reconnaissance flights over Laos; however, it at least indirectly also involves South Vietnam. /

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June 9

**Memorandum for the DCI
from Sherman Kent for the
Board of National Estimates**

**"Would the Loss of South Vietnam and Laos Precipitate a
'Domino Effect' in the Far East?"**

"..... We do not believe that the loss of South Vietnam and Laos would be followed by the rapid, successive communization of the other states of the Far East..... A continuation of the spread of communism in the area would not be inexorable, and any spread which did occur would take time..... The loss of South Vietnam and Laos to the Communists would be profoundly damaging to the US position in the Far East..... Sihanouk would probably accelerate his movement toward accommodation with the Communists..... Thailand would almost certainly shift toward a neutralist position..... The chief effect would be upon Communist China, both in boosting its already remarkable self-confidence and in raising its prestige as a leader of World Communism....."

June 15

**Memorandum to Secretaries Meeting at State Department re Congressional Resolution
of State and Defense from
M. Bundy**

M

Mr. McCone received a copy of a folder, under cover of a memorandum from M. Bundy, containing the documents to be considered at the meeting. They included a memorandum prepared by W. H. Sullivan on the situation in South Vietnam; a memorandum prepared by W. P. Bundy on "Probable Developments and the Case for a Congressional Resolution"; a draft resolution to the Congress; "Basic themes in presenting the resolution"; and "Questions and answers regarding the resolution." [There is no record in the file of the results of this meeting.]

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June 18

DCI Congressional Briefing CIA Subcommittee of the House Armed Services

The Director noted that the Viet Cong still hold the initiative throughout most of the country. He said the government's position is most serious and that the government's large and small scale operations against the Viet Cong have been showing some lag in the past few weeks.

June 28

Ambassador Lodge left Saigon

July 7

General Taylor arrived in Saigon to assume his new duties as US Ambassador to South Vietnam

July 19

General Khanh called publicly for a full-scale military attack on North Vietnam

July 23

State telegram to Saigon No. 224

Increased US military assistance to South Vietnam

"Opinion at highest level here now is that news of increase of US military assistance to South Vietnam would better come from Saigon than from Washington. . . . We believe joint announcement could say simply that two governments have agreed on need for intensification of pacification effort, and US has agreed to increase substantially its military and civilian participation in pacification effort, specifically including advisers with regular, paramilitary and special forces....."

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July 25

CIA cable from Saigon
SAIG 7689DeSilva's views on the will of the GVN to continue the war

".....the shakiness of Khanh's position, the tremors that are running through the GVN leadership, and the reports of acute war weariness and actions possibly under way to sense out the French on the subject of negotiations... represent not only a maneuver to catalyze USG reactions, but represent a grave crisis facing Khanh and his leadership, and appears to me to be a crisis possibly involving the will of the present leadership to continue the war. Sincere or not, Khanh purports to feel that war weariness has reached an acute stage, and that heroic new measures, beyond the borders of South Vietnam, are necessary to bring about a prospect of peace and victory....."

State telegram from Saigon
No. 213Taylor's views on Khanh's stress on need to move to the north

".....Khanh, after nearly six months in office, seems to have reached conclusion that frustrating and ineffective instruments of government at his command are not adequate to master Viet Cong by counter-insurgency means alone. He and his colleagues seem to have decided that they can bring about cessation of Viet Cong harassment only by bringing direct pressure to bear on North. If they are unsuccessful in getting US more directly involved, it is difficult to judge at this stage how strong pressures would become within GVN to see a negotiated solution. However, there are signs that this possibility cannot be excluded....."

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July 25
(cont'd)

State telegram from Saigon
No. 214

Taylor proposes joint contingency planning for action against North Vietnam

The Ambassador requests authorization to discuss with Khanh a proposal for joint US-GVN planning for various forms of extended action against NVN. He sees such talks as providing an outlet for the GVN "martial head of steam", gaining time to stabilize the government, providing a useful basis for possible military action in the future, and allowing an opportunity to judge the political objectives the GVN sees in such military efforts.

State telegram from Saigon
No. 215

Taylor proposes that Khanh make the announcement of increased US aid to South Vietnam

"On further reflection and considering importance doing utmost to give some prompt visible support and build-up to Khanh, believe I should give him opportunity to make the formal announcement of increase to be followed up by backgrounder by me. This will enable Khanh present Vietnamese people with solid achievement of increased US material support and hopefully serve in some small degree undercut pressures on him reported in Embels 213 and 214.

Presidential Meeting on Vietnam. CIA participants: DDCI and C/FE. Record by C/FE.

Discussion of Taylor's telegrams 213, 214, & 215

The President requested that Ambassador Taylor discuss with General Khanh a joint and secret evaluation of the prospects of North Vietnam operations. He further requested the JCS to provide additional actions which might be taken with minimum escalation but maximum effect to improve the situation in Vietnam. The President also requested a major effort to produce an economic achievement in South Vietnam. The results of the meeting are summarized in Deptel 253, which is summarized in the following entry.

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July 26

Memorandum for the DCI
from Sherman Kent for the
Board of National Estimates

"Probable Communist Reactions to Certain US or US-Sponsored
Courses of Action in Vietnam and Laos"

In response to GVN air or ground force raids on the Viet Cong supply and infiltration corridor in the Laos panhandle, the BNE believes that none of the Communist powers involved would respond with major military moves designed to change the nature of the conflict. Reaction to air strikes on North Vietnam itself would be sharper, but even in this case fear of escalation would probably restrain the Communists from a major military response. The Soviets would give Hanoi vigorous political and propaganda support, and would probably place themselves in the forefront of those calling for an international conference--and might accompany this by leading a move in the UN to condemn the US.

State telegram to Vientiane
& Saigon. No. 261 to Saigon

Unger's views are sought on proposal for air attacks on VC
supply lines in Laotian Panhandle

"Primarily for reasons of morale in South Vietnam and to divert GVN attention from proposal to strike North Vietnam, we are considering proposing to Ambassador Taylor that he discuss with Khanh air attacks on VC supply lines in the Laotian Panhandle.....Request your views on such operations....."

July 27

State telegram from
Vientiane. No. 170

Unger's reply re proposal to bomb VC supply lines in Laos

"Air attacks on Viet Cong supply lines in Laotian Panhandle, while helping morale South Vietnam and diverting government there from its proposals to strike North Vietnam, would have only marginal effect on problem of infiltration via Laos and would greatly complicate Laotian situation.....When various cross-border actions were proposed earlier, also including air strikes, I pointed out fundamental attitude of Souvanna, which generally shared by Lao, that use of corridor, even though

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July 25
(cont'd)

State telegram to Saigon
No. 253

Results of July 25 Presidential Meeting are cabled to Taylor

"..... Proposal your 215 for announcement personnel increase fully approved..... Re proposal your 214, our objective should be to provide channel for frustrations of Khanh and generals without committing USG to action and with minimum risk of disruptive leaks..... JCS considering urgently what additional external measures might be taken, short of attack on DRV itself, that would provide maximum military benefit with minimum risks of escalation or international complications....."

State telegram to Saigon
No. 245

Suggestion that Taylor tell Khanh that USG willing to dissociate itself from General Minh

"As part of problem of making clear our full support for Khanh, we have been concerned that he may have the feeling that USG in past has been pressuring him to maintain Minh's position and go easy with Dalat generals..... You may in your discretion sound Khanh out whether he wishes us dissociate ourselves further from Minh and whether he needs our support in taking tough line against Dalat or other generals."

State telegram to Saigon
No. 254

Proposal for dramatic effort on a single project or area in SVN

"At highest level meeting today, concern was expressed that despite many desirable AID contributions to economic and social progress in rural areas, the pacification effort is not offering the Vietnamese peasant a sharply contrasting alternative between life under the VC and a clearly better deal with the GVN. It was proposed that US undertake with GVN a dramatic and intensive social and economic effort on a single project or area which would highlight as quickly and effectively as possible the opportunity for progress after pacification....." The cable lists several possible efforts.

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July 27
(cont'd)State telegram from
Vientiane, No. 179
(cont'd)

involving Lao territory, not primarily their problem. . . . I believe proposed action would probably bring to an end possibility our preserving even facade of government national union under Souvanna and Geneva accords. . . . I believe it would be exceptionally difficult to persuade Souvanna Phouma to approve stepped up military actions in Panhandle without triggering virtually irresistible pressures for similar escalation in this part of Laos. . . . "

July 28

State telegram from Saigon
No. 232

Taylor reports discussion with Khanh re possible joint contingency planning

The Ambassador met with General Khanh on July 27 to make up the proposal outlined in Deptel 253. " It came out clearly that Khanh is thinking about reprisal tit-for-tat bombing rather than a movement north with land forces or massive bombing to effect total destruction of Hanoi and all its works. . . . Taylor suggested the desirability of joint contingency planning for an expanded effort against the North. Khanh said he was pleased to receive the proposal and would think it over for a few days. . . . Khanh said they would shortly be ready with a decree declaring a national 'state of emergency' He said he had given up project of declaring 'state of war' as he recognized could not have this without 'declaring war against someone' "

August 2 & 4 North Vietnamese PT boats attacked the US destroyers Maddox and C. Turner Joy in the Gulf of Tonkin

August 4/5 US Navy planes bombed North Vietnam coastal bases, patrol boats, and an oil installations in a five-hour raid along 100 miles of coastline

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Approved for Release: 2022/01/28 C05594020

August 12

DCI Congressional Briefing

Defense Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee

The Director commented on the covert operations in NVN which previously were conducted by the Agency but which have been turned over to MACV. He indicated that there had been many disappointments with these operations; i. e., a number of teams rolled up and a lack of significant sabotage efforts. The DCI pointed out that he was not offering this as criticism but that it is disturbing since it would indicate that the people in NVN are not receptive to assist the teams.

August 14

**State telegram to Saigon
(No. 439), Vientiane, &
CINCPAC**

Next courses of action in Southeast Asia

"The next ten days to two weeks should be short hold phase in which we would avoid actions that would in any way take onus off Communist side for escalation. . . . South Vietnam not going well. . . . Our actions of last week lifted morale temporarily, but also aroused expectations, and morale could easily sag back again if VC have successes and we do nothing further. . . . Hanoi and Peiping as of now certainly not persuaded they must abandon efforts in South Vietnam and Laos. . . . South Vietnam still main theater. . . . Basically solution in both South Vietnam and Laos will require combination military pressure and some form of communications under which Hanoi (and Peiping) eventually accept idea of getting out. Negotiation without continued military action will not achieve our objectives in foreseeable future. . . . We might at some point conclude that systematic military action against DRV was required either because of incidents. . . or because of deterioration in SVN situation. . . ."

August 16

Premier Khanh was elected president under a new constitution approved by the MRC. Minh was ousted as Chief of State, a largely ceremonial post that was abolished.

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August 18

State telegram from Saigon
No. 465Taylor replies to Deptel 439, giving his suggested courses of action

The Ambassador suggests two possible approaches. Course A would involve three steps: (1) Actions directed at the Khanh government; (2) actions directed at the Hanoi government; (3) following a pause of some duration, initiation of an orchestrated air attack against North Vietnam. Course B would be similar to Course A, except that military pressure against NVN would begin at once without awaiting evidence of performance under steps (1) and (2) of Course A. "..... It is concluded that course of action A offers the greater promised achievement of US policy objectives in SVN during the coming months. However, we should always bear in mind the fragility of the Khanh government and be prepared to shift quickly to course of action B if the situation requires. In either case, we must be militarily ready for any response which may be initiated by North Vietnam or by Communist China....."

August 22

The Matthias paper (see entry of June 8/) was widely commented upon in the press. Press accounts noted that the paper was made public because the Chicago Tribune had apparently obtained a copy. The press noted Sherman Kent's comment that the paper had "general

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August 22
(cont'd)

Board approval, although no attempt has been made to reach general agreement on every point." The press also noted that administration officials said Matthias assessment of the South Vietnamese situation did not reflect official Washington policy.

August 25

The newly-formed regime of SVN President Khanh announced its resignation. The ruling MRC announced that it had voted to "repeal the constitution and to meet soon to elect a new leader."

August 26

State telegram from Saigon No. 561

Taylor meeting with Minh re MRC election of a new leader

Taylor met with Minh at the latter's request. Minh wanted to know USG reaction if someone other than Khanh were elected. Taylor told Minh the best Minh could do would be to attend the electoral meeting, take a strong position for a united front, and support Khanh.

State telegram to Saigon No. 521

The Department endorses Taylor's advice to Minh

The telegram was actually drafted and released by M. V. Forrestal. "Fully concur line supporting Khanh you have privately taken with generals. You should continue efforts along this line so long as you deem them appropriate....."

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- August 27** The press reported that the MRC was replaced by a triumvirate of generals made up of Khanh, Minh, and Kiem. All three were to have equal power.
- September 2** CIA cable from Saigon SAIG 8532 De Silva reports Taylor's request that Concin be transferred
- September 3** CIA cable to Saigon DIR 47210 DCI instructs de Silva to inform Taylor that Concin will be transferred
- September 5** Memorandum prepared by W. P. Bundy "Possible Courses of Action for South Vietnam"
- "The situation in South Vietnam is deteriorating. . . . The current political crisis is not yet worked out, and renewed riots or even an attempted coup are still possible. [The reference here is to the resignation of Khanh on August 28, his staying in Dalat "for reasons of health", and the uncertain nature of the interim government.] The odds have become very great that if we do not inject some major new elements--and perhaps even if we do--the situation will continue to go downhill. . . . " The possible actions Bundy considers are a move toward taking over command, a major further enlargement of the advisory effort, enlarged combat use of units now in South Vietnam, major new US units for specific missions and areas, etc.
- September 6** State cable from Saigon No. 768 Review of the situation in South Vietnam at the time of the Ambassador's departure for Washington
- ". . . . What has emerged from the recent events is a definition within fairly broad limits of the degree to which perfectability in government can be pushed. It should be remembered that the recent fracas started when Khanh sought

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September 6
(cont'd)

State cable from Saigon
No. 768 (cont'd)

to make his broad and cumbersome government more tractable and more effective. . . . But now, after this recent experience at government improvement, we must accept the fact that an effective government, much beyond the capacity of that which had existed over the past several months, is unlikely to survive. . . . We may. . . expect to find ourselves. . . actively assuming increased responsibility for the outcome following a time-schedule consistent with our estimate of the limited viability of any South Vietnamese government. . . . There is no present urge to march north among our Vietnamese friends; the leadership is exhausted and frustrated following the recent disorders and are not anxious to take on any new problems or obligations. . . . Our objective up to about December 1 should be to get going some kind of government worthy of the name while shoring up morale and holding enemy activities in check. . . ."

September 8 Memorandum prepared
by W. P. Bundy

"Courses of Action for South Vietnam" - consensus reached by Taylor, Rusk, McNamara, and Wheeler

" We recommend: (1) US naval patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin should be resumed immediately. . . . (2) 34A operations by the GVN should be resumed immediately thereafter. . . . (3) Limited GVN air and ground operations into the corridor of Laos should be undertaken in the near future. . . . (4) We should be prepared to respond on a tit-for-tat basis against the DRV in the event of any attack on US units or any special DRV/VC action against SVN. . . ."

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September 8 **Memorandum for DCI**
(cont'd) **from DD/I**

"Coping with the Chronic Crisis in South Vietnam"

"It is hard to say anything new about the Vietnam crisis. . . . It has been impossible to rate the odds very high for stabilization of political authority and containment of the Viet Cong war. Our SNEE ready for USIB action this week says the chances are against such a favorable development, so the whole intelligence community is now committed to the pessimistic view which CIA has taken for about a year. In looking at the problem of what to do about it, Washington policy makers tend to speak in terms of alternatives, somewhat along these lines: (a) . . . strategic withdrawal . . . (b) . . . go ahead with an intensified, 'massive' counterinsurgency effort . . . (c) . . . a more militant though generally covert campaign of striking back at the North Vietnamese infrastructure of support for the Viet Cong . . . (d) . . . a militant line of bringing direct military punitive measures to bear on North Vietnam. . . . All of these courses of action have been spelled out in careful studies, so what is needed is not more paperwork but a firm policy of action. To date we have rejected . . . strategic withdrawal. . . . I think we have reached the point in the road where we must consider the other courses of action not as alternatives but as essential complementary steps necessary to be taken together and quickly in order to increase the unfavorable odds of survival for a pro-US, anti-Communist regime in South Vietnam."

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