

# 1963 Memo -- The

*Following is a partial text of a Sept. 16, 1963, memorandum from Assistant Secretary of State Roger Hilsman to Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Other documents, from the Pentagon study, indicate Hilsman was recommending here that the United States pressure South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem to remove from power his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu.*

Attached are two cables — one on the “reconciliation track” and one on the “pressures and persuasion track.”

I think it is important to note that these are true alternatives—i.e., the “reconciliation track” is not the same as Phase I of the “pressures and persuasion track.” The difference is in public posture.

Phase I of the “pressures and persuasion track” continues to maintain a public posture of disapproval of the GVN’s (South Vietnamese) policies of repression.

The “reconciliation track” requires a public posture of acquiescence in what the GVN has recently done and even some effort by the U.S. to put these recent actions in

as good a light as we possibly can.

## No Switching

If this distinction, which is a real one, is preserved, then it seems to me clear that it will not be possible to switch from the “reconciliation track” to a “pressures and persuasion track” if the former does not work — except in the event that Diem and Nhu provide us with another dramatic act of repression as an excuse.

On the other hand, it will be possible to switch from a “pressures and persuasion track” to a “reconciliation

## Two Alternatives

track” at any time during Phase I and II of the “pressures and persuasion track,” although probably not after we had entered Phases III and IV.

My own judgment is that the “reconciliation track” will not work. I think that Nhu has already decided on an adventure. I think he feels that the progress already made in the war and the U.S. material on hand gives him freedom to launch on a course that has a minimum and a maximum goal.

The minimum goal would be sharply to reduce the American presence in those

key positions which have political significance in the provinces and the strategic hamlet program and to avoid any meaningful concessions that would go against his Mandarin, “personalist” vision of the future of Vietnam.

### Maximum Goal

The maximum goal, I would think, would be a deal with North Vietnam for a truce in the war, a complete removal of the U.S. presence, and a “neutralist” or “Titoist” but still separate South Vietnam . . .

I would recommend adopting as our initial course Phases I and II of the “pres-

ures and persuasion track,” testing and probing as we go along and being ready to switch to “reconciliation” at any moment that it becomes necessary, using the decision to switch as a means of getting at least nominal concessions in order to save as much of our face as possible.

I make this recommendation with the caveat that we do not have sufficient information to make a final and complete judgment on either of the two key issues — where Nhu will lead Vietnam if he remains in power and whether or not enough people will continue to fight the Viet Cong to bring victory.

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