

PAPER ABOUT DIEM AMONG HUNT DATA

APR MAY 28 1973

Orders for Envoy Included but Validity Is Unclear

NYTimes

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 27—A document purporting to be a 10-year-old State Department cable dealing with American policy toward former South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem was in the possession of E. Howard Hunt Jr., the convicted Watergate conspirator, in the Summer of 1971.

The document, dated three days before Mr. Diem was killed in a 1963 coup d'etat, takes the form of an instruction from high officials of the Kennedy Administration to Henry Cabot Lodge, the United States Ambassador in Saigon at the time, that President Diem should not be given political asylum once he was deposed.

It was not known whether the document was authentic or not.

Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State under the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, said in a telephone interview today that the document had never existed. Mr. Lodge said in a similar interview that he had never received such a message.

Fabrication Charged

The New York Times reported today that John W. Dean 3d, President Nixon's counsel, had accused Hunt of fabricating diplomatic cables "relating to President Kennedy's complicity in Diem's assassination" while working as a White House consultant in 1971 and 1972.

The documents were reportedly discovered in a safe in the Executive Office Building quarters used by Hunt, who pleaded guilty in January to conspiracy in the Watergate case. The safe was emptied two days after the June 17, Watergate break-in on orders from Mr. Dean.

The Presidential lawyer has since said that he gave two file folders containing the allegedly false material to L. Patrick Gray 3d, then the acting director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

According to Mr. Gray, who resigned from his post today, Mr. Dean told him that the papers, although not materially related to the Watergate case, constituted "political dynamite." Mr. Gray has said that he did not examine the documents, but instead destroyed them.

Text Obtained

The Times obtained today the text of one of the documents in Hunt's possession during the late summer of 1971. The source of the text was

William G. Lambert, a former investigative reporter for Life magazine, which is no longer published.

Mr. Lambert, who said he had seen but did not possess the original document, refused to identify his source, although he would not deny that it was Hunt.

However, The Times has established that Hunt was in fact Mr. Lambert's source for the document, which purported to be a State Department Teletype message sent to Mr. Lodge on Oct. 29, 1963.

It is now known whether the document in question remained in Hunt's possession until the time of the Watergate break-in last year, or whether it was among the papers destroyed by Mr. Gray.

The alleged cable, which carries six signatures, including that of McGeorge Bundy, in 1963 a special assistant to President Kennedy for national security affairs, reads as follows:

"At highest level meeting today, decision reluctantly made that neither you or Harkins [Gen. Paul D. Harkins, then commander of United States forces in Vietnam] should intervene in behalf of Diem or Nhu [Ngo Dinh Nhu, President Diem's brother] in event they seek asylum.

"This based on two principal considerations: Granting asylum or otherwise protecting the brothers certain to alienate if not enrage generals. Of near equal importance is our reluctance see Diem depart SVN [South Vietnam] only to re-establish himself in another country where he would be quite capable of establishing government in exile and denouncing you and USG [United States Government].

"Moreover, leaders of successful coup deserve clean slate in SVN, which they likely achieve by making sure neither brother survives. All of us here realize this instruction places you in uncomfortable and distasteful position.

'Extreme Sensitivity'

"Nevertheless, we believe future success of Vietnam efforts depends upon displacement Nhu and Diem. In effect, they have brought this stage upon themselves and their ultimate fate is now Vietnamese affair.

"Hardly underscore extreme sensitivity this message, but authorize you at your discretion show Harkins such portions as necessary insure his compliance."

Mr. Bundy, who since 1966 has been president of the Ford Foundation, said in a telephone interview that the purported cable was "the crudest kind of forgery."

Mr. Lodge, when told of the alleged message, laughed and replied that although he had never received it, "I would have remembered it had I gotten it."

Hunt, reached at the District

of Columbia Jail through his lawyer, William P. Bittman, said he would have no comment on either the authenticity of the document or Mr. Dean's allegations.

Mr. Lambert, however, said that he was not convinced that the cable was a forgery. "The original source of the information which led me to the document believed [it] to be authentic," he said by telephone from his home in Rye, N. Y.

Mr. Lambert said he had been told that the cable had been sent to Vietnam on Oct. 29, 1963, over two of the three existing communications systems—that operated by the State Department, and another, called a "backchannel," controlled by the Central Intelligence Agency.

The third system, controlled by the Defense Department, was not used, he said. He suggested that the Pentagon had never known of the cable's existence—hence its absence from the Pentagon papers. "A secret Defense Department study of the Vietnam war, leaked to the press in 1972.

The Pentagon papers show that President Kennedy knew of and approved plans for the coup against President Diem by a group of South Vietnamese generals.

In fact, the American mission in Saigon maintained secret contact with the generals for weeks before the coup on Nov. 1, 1963, and kept the White House informed of each development.

There was no suggestion in the Pentagon papers that anyone in the American diplomatic or military commands knew in advance that President Diem would be killed, or advocated his murder.

However, at a news conference on Sept. 20, 1971, President Nixon said in answer to a question, "... I would remind all concerned that the way we got into Vietnam was through overthrowing Diem and the complicity in the murder of Diem..."

Mr. Nixon made the remark after the time that Mr. Lambert said he had first seen the documents in question.