

Cable on Diem's Treaty Request

Cablegram from the United States Embassy in Saigon to the State Department, Oct. 1, 1961. A copy of the message was sent to the commander in chief of Pacific forces.

Discussion with Felt and party, McGarr, Nolting yesterday Diem asked for bilateral defense treaty. Large and unexplained request. Serious. Put forward as result of Diem's fear of outcome of Laos situation, SVN vulnerability to increased infiltration, feelings that SEATO action would be inhibited by UK and France in the case of SVN as in Laos.

Nolting told Diem question had important angle and effect on SEATO.

Major repeated to Thuan and believe he understands better than Diem some of thorny problems.

Fuller report of conversation with Diem will follow but would like to get quick preliminary reaction from Washington on this request.

Our reaction is that the request should be seriously and carefully treated to pre-

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vent feeling that US is not serious in intention to support SVN. But see major issues including overriding Article 19, Geneva Accords, possible ratification problems as well as effect on SEATO.

Diem's request arises from feeling that US policy on Laos will expose his

flank in infiltration and lead to large-scale hostilities in SVN. So seeking a stronger commitment than he thinks he has now through SEATO. Changing US policy on Laos, especially SEATO decision to use force if necessary to protect SVN and Thailand, would relieve pressure for bilateral treaty.