

KEY VIETNAM TEXTS FROM

Following are texts of key documents accompanying the Pentagon's study of the Vietnam war, for the period of the 1963 coup d'état against President Ngo Dinh Diem, the events leading up to it and its aftermath. Except where excerpting is specified, the documents are printed verbatim, with only unmistakable typographical errors corrected.

JULY 1, 1971

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PERIOD OF DIEM COUP

Notes on Kennedy Meeting On Diem Regime in July, 1963

Memorandum by Roger Hilsman, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, on a meeting held at the White House July 4, 1963. Besides President Kennedy and Mr. Hilsman, participants were Under Secretary of State George Ball; Under Secretary of State Averell Harriman; McGeorge Bundy, Presidential assistant for national security, and Michael V. Forrestal, Southeast Asia specialist on the White House staff.

The President was briefed on developments in Indonesia, Laos and Viet-Nam. The portion on Viet-Nam follows:

A joint agreement was signed on June 16 in which the Government met the Buddhists' five demands. The Buddhists and the Government then worked together on the funeral arrangements for the bonze who burned himself to death so that incidents could be avoided. The funeral came off without trouble.

Since then there have been rumors circulating in Saigon that the Government does not intend to live up to the agreement. These rumors were given credence by an article appearing in the English-language "Times" of Viet-Nam, which is dominated by the Nhus. The article contained a veiled attack on the US and on the Buddhists. There was a suggestion that the monk who burned

himself to death was drugged and a provocative challenge to the Buddhists that, if no further demonstrations occurred on July 2, this would amount to an admission by the Buddhists that they were satisfied with the Government's action. (The President injected questions on the possibility of drugging, to which Mr. Hilsman replied that religious fervor was an adequate explanation.)

At this point there was a discussion of the possibility of getting rid of the Nhus in which the combined judgment was that it would not be possible.

Continuing the briefing, Mr. Hilsman said that the Buddhists contained an activist element which undoubtedly favored increasing demands as well as charging the Government with dragging its feet. There was thus an element of truth in Diem's view that the Buddhists might push their demands so far as to make his fall inevitable.

During these events the US had put extremely heavy pressure on Diem to take political actions. Most recently we had urged Diem to make a speech which would include announcements that he intended to meet with Buddhist leaders, permit Buddhist chaplains in the army and so on. If Diem did not make such a speech and there were further demonstrations, the US would be compelled publicly to disassociate itself from the GVN's Buddhist policy. Mr. Hilsman reported that Diem had received this approach with what seemed to be excessive politeness but had said he would consider making such a speech.

Our estimate was that no matter what Diem did there will be coup attempts over the next four months. Whether or not any of these attempts

will be successful is impossible to say.

Mr. Hilsman said that everyone agreed that the chances of chaos in the wake of a coup are considerably less than they were a year ago. An encouraging sign relative to this point is that the war between the Vietnamese forces and the Viet Cong has been pursued throughout the Buddhist crisis without noticeable let-up.

At this point Mr. Forrestal reported on General Krulak's views that, even if there were chaos in Saigon, the military units in the field would continue to confront the Communists.

Mr. Hilsman went on to say that Ambassador Nolting believes that the most likely result of a coup attempt that succeeded in killing Diem was civil war. Mr. Hilsman disagreed with this view slightly in that he thought civil war was not the most likely result but that it was certainly a possible result.

The timing of Ambassador Nolting's return and Ambassador Lodge's assumption of duty was then discussed. The President's initial view was that Ambassador Nolting should return immediately, and that Ambassador Lodge should assume his duties as soon thereafter as possible. The President volunteered that Ambassador Nolting had done an outstanding job, that it was almost miraculous the way he had succeeded in turning the war around from the disastrously low point in relations between Diem and ourselves that existed when Ambassador Nolting took over. Mr. Hilsman pointed out the personal sacrifices that Ambassador Nolting had been forced to make during this period, and the President said that he hoped a way could be found to commend Ambassador Nolting publicly so as to make clear the fine job he had done and that he hoped an appropriate position could be found for him in Washington so that he could give his children a suitable home in the years immediately ahead.

The President's decision was to delegate the authority to decide on the timing of Ambassador Nolting's return to the Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs; that Ambassador Lodge should report to Washington no later than July 15 so that he could take the Counterinsurgency Course simultaneously with the normal briefings for an ambassador; and that Ambassador Lodge should arrive in Saigon as soon as possible following completion of the CI Course on August 14. Arrangements were made for Ambassador Nolting to see the President at 4:00 p.m. on Monday, July 8.