

# Further Rusk Cable to Lodge On Diem-Nhu Relationship

*Cablegram from Secretary Rusk to Ambassador Lodge, Aug. 29, 1963.*

Deeply appreciate your 375 which was a most helpful clarification. We fully understand enormous stakes at issue and the heavy responsibilities which you and Harkins will be carrying in the days ahead and we want to do everything possible from our end to help.

Purpose of this message is to explore further question of possible attempt to separate Diem and the Nhus. In your telegram you appear to treat Diem and the Nhus as a single package whereas we had indicated earlier to the Generals that if the Nhus were removed the question of retaining Diem would be up to them. My own personal assessment is (and this is not an instruction) that the Nhus are by all odds the greater part of the problem in Vietnam, internally, internationally and for American public opinion. Perhaps it is inconceivable that the Nhus could be removed without taking Diem with them or without Diem's abandoning his post. In any event, I would appreciate your comment on whether any distinction can or should be drawn as between Diem and Counselor and Madame Nhu.

The only point on which you and General Harkins have different views is whether an attempt should be made with Diem to eliminate the Nhus and presumably take other steps to consolidate the country behind a winning effort against the Viet Cong. My own hunch, based in part on the report of Kattenburg's conversations with Diem is that such an approach could not succeed if it were cast purely in terms of persuasion. Unless such a talk included a real sanction such as a threatened

withdrawal of our support, it is unlikely that it would be taken completely seriously by a man who may feel that we are inescapably committed to an anti-Communist Vietnam. But if a sanction were used in such a conversation, there would be a high risk that this would be taken by Diem as a sign that action against him and the Nhus was imminent and he might as a minimum move against the Generals or even take some quite fantastic action such as calling on North Vietnam for assistance in expelling the Americans.

It occurs to me, therefore, that if such an approach were to be made it might properly await the time when others were ready to move immediately to constitute a new government. If this be so, the question then arises as to whether an approach to insist upon the expulsion of the Nhus should come from Americans rather than from the Generals themselves. This might be the means by which the Generals could indicate that they were prepared to distinguish between Diem and the Nhus. In any event, were the Generals to take this action it would tend to protect succeeding Vietnam administrations from the charge of being wholly American puppets subjected to whatever anti-American sentiment is inherent in so complex a situation.

I would be glad to have your further thoughts on these points as well as your views on whether further talks with Diem are contemplated to continue your opening discussions with him. You will have received formal instructions on other matters through other messages. Good luck.