

# Lodge Cable to Kennedy On Means of Bringing Reforms

Cablegram from Ambassador Lodge to State Department "for President only," Sept. 19, 1963.

1. Agree that no good opportunity for action to remove present government in immediate future is apparent and that we should, therefore, do whatever we can as an interim measure pending such an eventuality.

2. Virtually all the topics under paragraph 4, letters A to M, have been taken up with Diem and Nhu at one time or another, most of them by me personally. They think that most of them would either involve destroying the political structure on which they rest or loss of face or both. We, therefore, could not realistically hope for more than lip service. Frankly, I see no opportunity at all for substantive changes. Detailed comments on items A to M are contained in separate telegram.

3. There are signs that Diem-Nhu are somewhat bothered by my silence. According to one well placed source, they are guessing and off-balance and "desperately anxious" to know what U.S. posture is to be. They may be preparing some kind of a public relations package, possibly to be opened after the elections. I believe that for me to press Diem on things which are not in the cards and to repeat what we have said several times already would be a little shrill and would make us look weak, particularly in view of my talk with Nhu last night at a dinner where I had a golden opportunity to make the main points of your CAP 63516 as reported in 541.

4. Also, I doubt that a public relations package will meet needs of situation which seems particularly grave to me, notably in the light of General Big Minh's opinion expressed very privately yesterday that the Viet Cong are steadily gaining in strength; have more of the population on their side than has the GVN; that arrests are continuing and that the prisons are full; that more and more students are going over to the Viet Cong; that there is great graft and corruption in the Vietnamese administration of our aid; and that the "Heart of the Army is not in the war." All this by Vietnamese No. 1 General is now echoed by Secretary of Defense Thuan (See my 542), who wants to leave the country.

5. As regards your paragraph 3 on withholding of aid, I still hope that I may be informed of methods, as requested in my 478, September 11, which will enable us to apply sanctions in a way which will really affect Diem and Nhu without precipitating an economic collapse and without impeding the war effort. We are studying this here and have not yet found a solution. If a way to do this were to be found, it would

be one of the greatest discoveries since the enactment of the Marshall Plan in 1947 because, so far as I know, the U.S. had never yet been able to control any of the very unsatisfactory governments through which we have had to work in our many very successful attempts to make these countries strong enough to stand alone.

6. I also believe that whatever sanctions we may discover should be directly tied to a promising coup d'etat and should not be applied without such a coup being in prospect. In this connection, I believe that we should pursue contact with Big Minh and urge him along if he looks like acting. I particularly think that the idea of supporting a Vietnamese Army independent of the government should be energetically studied.

7. I will, of course, give instructions that programs which one [sic] can be effectively held up should be held up and not released without my approval provided that this can be done without serious harmful effect to the people and to the war effort. Technical assistance and (omission) support to communications support programs may be one way. This would be a fly-speck in the present situation and would have no immediate effect, but I hope that U.S. (omission) may get Vietnamese officials into the habit of asking me to release items which are held up and that, over a long period of time, it might create opportunities for us to get little things done.

8. But it is not even within the realm of possibility that such a technique could lead them to do anything which causes loss of face or weakening of their political organization. In fact, to threaten them with suppression of aid might well defeat our purposes and might make a bad situation very much worse.

9. There should in any event be no publicity whatever about this procedure. If it is possible (omission) a program, I intend to (omission).

10. As regards your paragraph 6 and "dramatic symbolic moves," I really do not think they could understand this even if Thao wanted to, although I have talked about it to Diem, and to Nhu last night (See my 541). They have scant comprehension of what it is to appeal to public opinion as they have really no interest in any other opinion than their own. I have repeatedly brought up the question of Nhu's departure and have stressed that if he would just stay away until after Christmas, it might help get the Appropriation Bill through. This seems like a small thing to us but to

them it seems tremendous as they are quite sure that the Army would take over if he even stepped out of the country.

11. Your paragraph 8. I have, of course, no objection to seeing Diem at any time that it would be helpful. But I would rather let him sweat for awhile and not go to see him unless I have something really new to bring up. I

would much prefer to wait until I find some part of the AID program to hold up in which he is interested and then have him ask me to come and see him. For example, last night's dinner which I suspect Nhu of stimulating is infinitely better than for me to take the initiative for an appointment and to call at the office. Perhaps my silence had something to do with it.