

# 1961 Request by South Vietnam For U.S. Combat Forces

*Cablegram from United States Embassy in Saigon to the State Department, Oct. 13, 1961, on requests by Nguyen Dinh Thuan, Defense Minister of South Vietnam. Copies of this message were sent to Commander in Chief of Pacific forces and to the United States Embassies in Bangkok, Thailand, and Taipei, Taiwan.*

Thuan in meeting - October 13 made the following requests:

1. Extra squadron of AD-6 in lieu of proposed T-28's and delivery ASAP.

2. U.S. Civilian contract pilots for helicopters and C-47's for "non-combat" operations.

3. U. S. combat units or units to be introduced into SVN as "combat-trainer units". Part to be stationed in North near 17th Parallel to free ARVN forces there for anti-guerrilla action in high plateau. Also perhaps in several provincial seats in the highlands of Central Vietnam.

4. U. S. reaction to proposal to request Nationalist China to send one division of combat troops for operations in the Southwest.

Thuan referred to captured diary of VM officer killed in Central SVN, containing information on VM plans and techniques. Being analyzed, translated and would pass on. Said Diem in light of situation in Laos, infiltration into SVN, and JFK's interest as shown by sending Taylor, requested U. S. to urgently consider requests.

On U. S. combat trainer units, Nolting asked whether Diem's considered request, in view of repeated views opposed. Thuan so confirmed, Diem's views changed in light of worsening situation. Wanted a symbolic U. S. strength near 17th to prevent attacks there, free own forces there. Similar purpose station U. S. units in several provincial seats in central highlands, freeing ARVN ground forces there. Nolting said major requests on heels of Diem request for bilateral treaty. Nolting asked if in lieu of treaty. Thuan said first step quicker than treaty and time was of the essence. Thuan said token forces would

satisfy SVN and would be better than treaty (Had evidently not thought through nor discussed with Diem).

Discussed ICC angle. Nolting mentioned value SVN previously attached to ICC presence. Thuan agreed, felt case could be made for introduction of U. S. units for guard duty not combat unless attacked. Could be put in such a way to preserve ICC in SVN. Nolting said doubted if compatible but could be explored (McGarr and I call attention to two points: in view of proposed units, training function more a cover than reality; if send U. S. units should be sufficient strength, since VC attack likely).

On Chinat force, Thuan said Chiang had earlier given some indication (not too precise I gathered) of willingness. Thuan said GVN did not want to follow-up without getting U. S. reaction. Idea to use about 10,000 men in southwest as far from 17th as possible. Also intended to draft eligibles of Chinese origin into forces. Thuan thought perhaps Chinats could be introduced covertly, but on analyses gave this up. Nolting said he thought Chinats would want something out of deal, maybe political lift from introducing Chinat forces on Asia mainland (Nolting thinks trial balloon only).

Questions will undoubtedly be raised with Taylor. Obvious GVN losing no opportunity to ask for more support as a result of our greater interest and concern. But situation militarily and psychologically has moved to a point where serious and prompt consideration should be given.

(Note: Will be meeting on this in Admiral Heinz's office, 1330, 16 October to get reply out today. Applicable CINCPAC 140333, 140346)