

CRITICISM OF DIEM

Mr. REUSS. Let me call your attention now to the cable. There is a section here on criticism of Diem and his government, to the effect that such criticism makes the war effort more difficult. The emphasis is on the fact that light, unjustified criticism of Diem by newsmen makes the war effort more difficult. Do you think that that is sound information policy?

Before you answer, let me disclose the reason why I ask it. I should think that complete honesty in reporting the credits and debits of the Vietnamese Government, where it succeeds and where it is not succeeding, with perhaps some constructive suggestions as to how it could succeed, would be a better news policy.

I realize you did not become Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs until April 25, 1963, but anyway you are here today, so what do you have to say about that?

Mr. HILSMAN. I quite agree with you, and notice there is no censorship here in Vietnam * * *.

Mr. REUSS. But if I may interrupt that is precisely what is not said here. Secretary Rusk said just the opposite * * *. I was suggesting that I disagreed with Rusk on that.

Mr. HILSMAN. I think the point here, and I am again speculating because I wasn't the author of the cable, as you pointed out, but I would think that what was meant here is that articles which quote a Government official of the United States as making a critical statement, even if he isn't identified, is difficult. It makes relations difficult.

Mr. REUSS. True, but we are reading English here, and nothing like that is said in Rusk's cable.

Mr. HILSMAN. That is correct. I might also add that I think this cable is very badly drafted.

Mr. REUSS. Shouldn't its revocation and the institution of a new news guidance cable be a rather early order of business for you as Secretary?

Mr. HILSMAN. Well, as a matter of fact this cable is only one of a long series of steps, all of which have been in the direction of liberalization and more information on the Vietnam situation.

There have been many instructions to Saigon on press policy. These instructions were frequently parts of other cables, dealing with other matters, where the press policy was made, you know, in the heat of events. So this cable is only one of a long series of "press guidances," let's call them, that are in the same direction.

I think we have made some mistakes in handling the press problem in Vietnam, but I think we have been improving as we have gone along. There have been a lot of things that have been improved, and certainly has been no lack of critical articles in the American press.

Mr. MEADER. Will the gentleman yield for a question?

Mr. REUSS. Yes. I am almost through, but let me yield to Mr. Meader.

CABLE BADLY DRAFTED

Mr. MEADER. I was very interested in your comment on this cable, that it was badly drafted. It is a little ambiguous, just what you meant by that. Do you mean that the phraseology was inept or do you think that the substance was inept?