

# TELEGRAM INFORMATION REPORT TELEGRAM

## CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

*S. Vietnam*

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### CLASSIFICATION — DISSEMINATION CONTROLS

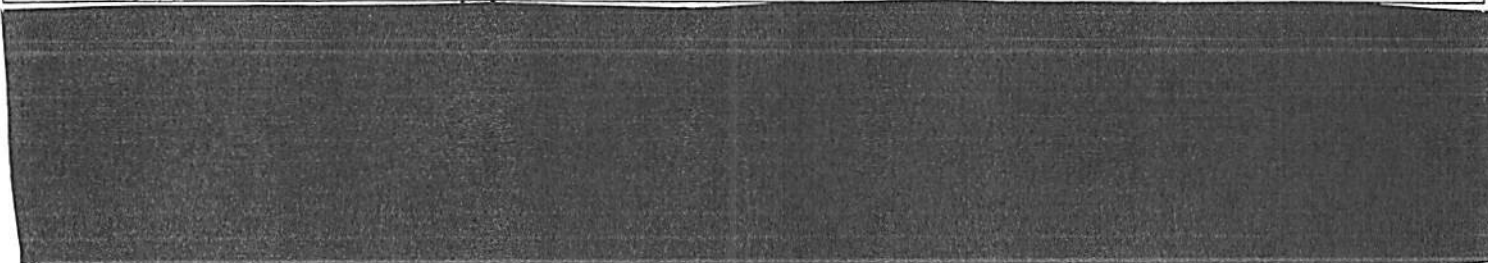
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COUNTRY	SOUTH VIETNAM	REPORT NO.	[REDACTED]
SUBJECT	NGO DINH NHU'S STATEMENTS ON THE GOVERNMENT ACTIONS AGAINST THE BUDDHISTS, DIEM'S INDISPENSIBILITY, THOS'S SUCCESSION, AND HIS OWN DISINTEREST IN LEADERSHIP	DATE DISTR.	23 AUGUST 1963
DATE OF INFO.	22 AUGUST 1963 AND AS STATED	PRECEDENCE	PRIORITY
PLACE & DATE ACQ.	VIETNAM, SAIGON (22 AUGUST 1963)	REFERENCES	IN 04630
APPRAISAL	SEE BELOW AND PARAGRAPH 15	FIELD REPORT NO.	

*Wire of Dist.*

THIS IS UNEVALUATED INFORMATION. SOURCE GRADINGS ARE DEFINITIVE. APPRAISAL OF CONTENT IS TENTATIVE.



1. SUMMARY. NGO DINH NHU STATED ON 22 AUGUST 1963 THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN INVOLVED IN THE DECISION TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST THE BUDDHISTS ON 20-21 AUGUST 1963. HE SAID THAT IT WAS INITIATED BY THE GENERAL OFFICERS IN A MEETING WITH PRESIDENT DIEM AS A RESULT OF THEIR DISATISFACTION WITH THE BUDDHIST CRISIS AND THE FEAR OF A VIET CONG PLANNED COUP D'ETAT ON 25 AUGUST. NGO DINH NHU CLAIMED THAT DIEM IS THE ONLY FIGURE WHO HOLDS THE ARMED FORCES TOGETHER, AND THAT IF HE DIED THERE WOULD BE ANARCHY; THAT EVERYONE RIDICULES THE IDEA OF VICE PRESIDENT NGUYEN NGOC THO'S SUCCESSION; AND, THAT HE (NHU) HAD NO TASTE FOR SUCCESSION AND WOULD REFUSE AN INTERIM LEADERSHIP. HE SAID THAT IT WAS IMPERATIVE THAT THE UNITED STATES ASSIST IN PERSUADING THE BUDDHISTS TO SEEK A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION OF THE CRISIS.

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GROUP 1  
Excluded from automatic  
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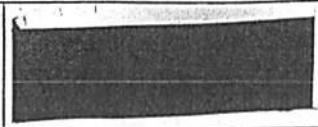
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 E.O. 13526, SEC. 3.5  
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 By *mrp* NARA, Date *5/17*

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2. NHU SAID THAT VARIOUS GENERAL OFFICERS HAVE EXPRESSED DISSATISFACTION TO PRESIDENT DIEM SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE BUDDHIST CRISIS IN HUE ON 8 MAY 1962. THEY HAVE FELT THAT THE FIRM AND CONSISTENT POLICY HAS NOT BEEN FOLLOWED AND THEY HAVE BEEN IMPATIENT WITH THE VIOLATIONS OF LAW AND ORDER. THE INCIDENT IN DA NANG INVOLVING THE BEATING OF THE ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM (ARVN) OFFICER AND THE SOLDIERS IN UNIFORM BY THE BONZES, RESULTING IN THE SERIOUS WOUNDING OF THE OFFICER, BURNING OF THE JEEP, AND SEIZURE OF THE OFFICER'S WEAPON, PROVED TO BE THE LAST STRAW FOR THE ARMED FORCES LEADERSHIP. THEY COULD NOT ACCEPT THE INSULT AND ASSAULT OF MILITARY PERSONNEL IN THE STREETS AT THE HANDS OF THE BONZES. BRIGADIER GENERAL LE VAN NGHIEM, FIRST CORPS COMMANDER, A BUDDHIST HIMSELF AND CONSIDERED SYMPATHETIC TO THE BUDDHISTS, WROTE A PERSONAL LETTER TO THICH TINH KIET PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF VIETNAMESE BUDDHISTS (GAVB) PROTESTING THE INSULT TO THE ARMED FORCES.

3. THE GENERAL OFFICERS, LED BY MAJOR GENERAL TRAN VAN DON, ARVN COMMANDER, INITIATED THE 20 AUGUST MEETING WITH DIEM. BEFORE THIS MEETING, DIEM HAD NOT REACHED A DECISION ON THE PRECISE COURSE TO FOLLOW. HOWEVER, FOR THE PREVIOUS THREE OR FOUR DAYS, HE HAD RECOGNIZED THE NEED TO MAKE SOME KIND OF DECISION AND TO ACCEPT PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY. THE GENERAL OFFICERS BRIEFED DIEM TO THE EFFECT THAT THE VIET CONG (VC) WERE PLANNING A COUP D'ETAT ON 25 AUGUST. IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE BONZES, STUDENTS, AND WORKERS, THE VC TROOPS PLANNED TO TAKE UP POSITIONS ON THE APPROACHES TO THE CAPITAL, AND TO INTENSIFY ACTION ACROSS THE LAO BORDER. THE GENERALS RECOMMENDED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MARTIAL LAW AND ACTION AGAINST

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THE BUDDHIST LEADERSHIP AND PAGODAS. THEY WISHED TO RE-ESTABLISH LEGALITY AND SECURITY. THEREUPON, DIEM APPROVED THEIR REQUEST. AT THE SAME TIME, DIEM SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM (GVN) IS ATTEMPTING TO PREVENT SUICIDES AND MURDERS BUT THESE MEASURES "SHOULD NOT BEGIN WITH MURDER ON OUR OWN PART." HE ASKED THE GENERALS TO AVOID KILLING ANYONE AND THE GENERALS REPLIED THEY COULD NOT PROMISE BUT WOULD DO THEIR BEST. DIEM ALSO SAID HE WAS NOT CHANGING HIS BASIC POLICY OF ATTEMPTING TO SOLVE THE BUDDHIST QUESTIONS ON THE BASIS OF JUSTICE. NHU STATED THAT HE WAS NOT PRESENT AT THIS MEETING AND HAD NOT BEEN CONSULTED BY DIEM SPECIFICALLY ON THE QUESTIONS INVOLVED. HE CLAIMED THAT THE MARTIAL LAW QUESTION HAD NOT EVEN CROSSED HIS MIND AND THAT HE WAS UNAWARE OF SPECIFIC PLANS OF ACTION ENVISAGED AGAINST THE BUDDHIST LEADERSHIP AND PAGODAS, HOWEVER, HE EXPRESSED TWO OR THREE TIMES HIS APPROVAL OF BOTH THESE MEASURES.

4. NHU SAID THAT HE SUBSEQUENTLY HAD ENVISAGED MARTIAL LAW WOULD LAST FOR ONLY 48 HOURS IN ORDER TO BREAK, AS HE PUT IT, THE GRASP OF TERRORISM OVER THE BUDDHISTS EXERCISED BY BONZES THICH TINH KHIEP, THICH TINH MINH, HEAD OF THE BUDDHIST STUDENTS OF CENTRAL VIETNAM, GAVB, AND THICH TRI QUANG, HEAD OF THE CENTRAL VIETNAM SECTION OF THE GAVB: TO PREVENT PAGODAS FROM BEING USED AS A CENTER OF POLITICAL AGITATION AND FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF SUICIDES: AND, TO RE-ESTABLISH CONDITIONS OF LEGALITY FROM WHICH NORMAL LAW AND ORDER COULD PROCEED.

5. AT SOME POINT AFTER THE GENERALS MEETING WITH DIEM, THEY VISITED NHU. GENERALS KHANH AND DINH PROPOSED TO NHU THAT HE SUGGEST TO DIEM THAT DIEM LEAVE SAIGON DURING THE ACTION CONTEMPLATED AND GO TO SOME OTHER PART OF SOUTH VIETNAM

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SUCH AS DALAT. THE PROPOSAL WAS APPARENTLY BASED ON THE GENERALS' FEELING THAT THIS RESPONSIBILITY SHOULD NOT DEVOLVE ON DIEM TOO PROXIMATELY. AT THE SAME TIME, THEY ASKED NHU TO REMAIN IN SAIGON AND SAID THAT NEITHER HE NOR THEY HAD POLITICAL AMBITIONS. WHEN ASKED WHETHER THE GENERALS WERE ATTEMPTING TO SUBSTITUTE NHU FOR DIEM, NHU REPLIED FIRMLY IN THE NEGATIVE AND ADDED THAT HE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER THEIR SUGGESTION WAS A MARK OF CONFIDENCE IN HIM OR WHETHER THEY WANTED TO KEEP HIM IN SAIGON AS A HOSTAGE. HE ANSWERED THE GENERALS TO THE EFFECT THAT ANY DECISION TO LEAVE SAIGON DEPENDED ON THE PRESIDENT AND THAT HE, HIMSELF, REMAINS UNDER THE ORDERS OF DIEM. THERE WAS NO MORE TALK ON THIS SUBJECT. NHU SAID THAT HE BELIEVES HIS OWN INFLUENCE WITH THE GENERAL OFFICERS IS GOOD BUT HE CLAIMS THAT HE SEES THEM ONLY INFREQUENTLY. OF ALL THE GENERAL OFFICERS, HE CONSIDERS NGUYEN KHANH THE CLOSEST TO HIM.

6. NHU STATED THAT DURING THIS MEETING THE GENERALS STATED THAT THEY HAD SWORN AN OATH OF LOYALTY TO THE PRESIDENT MANY TIMES, TOO MANY TIMES AS A MERELY VERBAL ACT. NOW, IN THE ACTION THEY WERE UNDERTAKING AGAINST THE BUDDHIST LEADERSHIP, THEY WERE PROVING IN ACTION THEIR OATH OF LOYALTY. NHU CLAIMS THAT DIEM'S AUTHORITY WITH ARMED FORCES REMAINS COMPLETE AND UNIMPAIRED. DIEM IS COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES. THE PRESIDENTIAL PROCLAMATION OF MARTIAL LAW DELIBERATELY LIMITED THE MARTIAL LAW TO THE SECURITY OF THE NATION AND DID NOT EXTEND IT TO CIVIL POWERS. DIEM CAN RECOVER THE POWERS HE HAD DELEGATED TO THE GENERALS TOMORROW IF NECESSARY. HOWEVER, IF HE RETREATS ON THE BUDDHIST QUESTION OR ON THE ISSUE OF PUBLIC ORDER, IF HE VACILLATES AND

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COMPROMISES WEAKLY, THE GENERALS WILL END UP KILLING HIM AS WELL AS THE BUDDHIST LEADERS. HE MUST SHOW HIMSELF FIRM IN APPLYING HIS POLICIES. DIEM HAS NOT BROKEN HIS PROMISE AND SEEKS A JUST SOLUTION OF THE BUDDHIST QUESTION WHICH IS NOT ONLY HIS PERSONAL POLICY BUT THE "POLICY DESIRED BY THE PEOPLE". THE CURRENT ACTION IS DIRECTED ONLY AGAINST THE EXTREMISTS AND RADICAL LEADERSHIP OF THE BUDDHIST MOVEMENT.

7. NHU SAID THAT HE FEELS THAT MARTIAL LAW DOES NOT IN ITSELF SOLVE ANYTHING, BUT PROVIDES ONLY THE BEGINNING CONDITION FOR SOLUTION, I.E., THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF ORDER AND OF THE POSSIBILITY FOR NEGOTIATION. HE REMARKED THAT HE THINKS IT IMPERATIVE THAT THE UNITED STATES SHOULD ASSIST IN PERSUADING THE BUDDHISTS TO SEEK A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION OF THE ISSUES ON A RELIGIOUS PLANE. UNLESS SUCH A SOLUTION CAN BE ACHIEVED, THERE CAN BE A MILITARY COUP D'ETAT AS TIME GOES ON AND AS THE GENERAL OFFICERS BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO POWER. AT THE SAME TIME, NHU SAID THAT THE GENERAL OFFICERS ARE DISCIPLINED AND THAT THE ARMED FORCES AT THE PRESENT TIME REMAIN FULLY IN THE PRESIDENT'S CONTROL.

8. FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF MILITARY ASSUMPTION OF COMPLETE POWERS, NHU STATED THAT THE PROLONGATION OF MARTIAL LAW WOULD BE DANGEROUS TO THE DIEM ADMINISTRATION. HE COMMENTED THAT THE CABINET MINISTERS HOLD THE SAME OPINION AND SAID THAT THE GENERAL OFFICERS ARE AWARE OF THE PRESIDENCY AND THE CABINET VIEWS ON THIS SUBJECT.

9. NHU REMARKED THAT THE UNITED STATES' DECLARATION DEPLORING GVN ACTION WOULD STIMULATE CONFUSION AND UNDERMINE COHESION IN SOUTH VIETNAM. HE CLAIMED

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THAT "WE ARE NOT REPRESSING BUDDHISTS BUT ONLY A FEW FANATIC LEADERS". THE PRESIDENT HAS NOT BROKEN HIS PROMISE.

10. WITH RESPECT TO THE ACTION AGAINST THE BUDDHISTS ON 20-21 AUGUST, NHU SAID ALL THE GENERAL OFFICERS AND THE HEADS OF SERVICES WERE JOINED TOGETHER AT THE GENERAL STAFF THAT NIGHT AND ENGAGED IN COORDINATED ACTION. HE SAID THAT HE FEELS THEY HAD PREPARED THEIR ACTION PLANS SOME TIME IN ADVANCE AND WERE CONSEQUENTLY ABLE TO CARRY OUT EFFECTIVE OPERATIONS WITHIN A MATTER OF HOURS. HE CLAIMS TO HAVE HAD NO PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIFIC PLANS INVOLVED. HE ALSO CLAIMS NOT TO HAVE ENCOURAGED THE GENERALS EITHER TO ASK FOR MARTIAL LAW OR TO TAKE RESULTING ACTIONS AGAINST THE BUDDHIST CHIEFS AND PAGODAS. HOWEVER, HE REPEATED HIS AGREEMENT WITH BOTH ACTIONS.

11. NHU STATED THAT THE CABINET MINISTERS HAD NOT BEEN CONSULTED ABOUT MARTIAL LAW OR THE OPERATION AGAINST THE BUDDHISTS. THEY WERE FURIOUS AND DEPRESSED. LATER, DIEM EXPLAINED TO THE CABINET MINISTERS HIS FAILURE TO CONSULT WITH THEM DID NOT MEAN LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN THEM. DIEM FELT HE HAD TO TAKE THE RESPONSIBILITY PERSONALLY AS AN ACT OF CIVIC COURAGE. ALSO, IF THE ACTION AGAINST THE BUDDHIST FAILED, MINISTERS WOULD HAVE BEEN SUSPECTED BY THE GENERALS OF LEAKING THE PLANS AND MIGHT HAVE INCURRED THEIR RETALIATION.

12. NHU SAID "WE WILL NOT TOLERATE ILLEGALITY. IF THE BONZES RETURN TO LEGALITY, WE WILL TREAT THEM AS MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY".

13. WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE CRISIS AT HUE UNIVERSITY, NHU SAID IT OCCURRED BECAUSE CAO VAN LUAN HAD VISITED WASHINGTON THREE OR FOUR MONTHS AGO AND RETURNED

TO SPREAD THE WORD THAT THE DIEM ADMINISTRATION WAS FINISHED AND ITS DAYS NUMBERED. LUAN HAD EXCITED THE HUE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TO STRIKE AND HAD PROPAGANDIZED TO THE EFFECT THAT IT WAS NECESSARY TO REPLACE THE ADMINISTRATION. THE REGIONAL DELEGATE, NGUYEN XUAN KHUONG, HAD RECOMMENDED LUAN'S DISMISSAL AND THE ARMY LEADERSHIP HAD BECOME DISSATISFIED BECAUSE OF LUAN'S AGITATION.

14. NHU COMMENTED THAT IF DIEM DIES OR LEAVES THE COUNTRY, THERE WILL BE ANARCHY. EVEN HIS NORMAL DEATH WILL RESULT IN A REVOLUTIONARY AND DANGEROUS SITUATION. UNDER SUCH CONDITIONS, VICE PRESIDENT NGUYEN NGOC THO WOULD REFUSE TO ACCEPT THE RESPONSIBILITY. NHU REMARKED THAT EVERYONE RIDICULES THE IDEA OF THO'S SUCCESSION. THE PROBABILITY IS THAT THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEE WOULD BE ESTABLISHED TO CONDUCT EVENTUAL ELECTIONS. THERE WOULD NOT BE A CONSTITUTIONAL SUCCESSION. NHU SAID THAT HE HAS NO TASTE FOR SUCCESSION AND WOULD REFUSE TO ATTEMPT AN INTERIM LEADERSHIP PENDING FORMATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT. DIEM IS THE ONLY FIGURE WHO HOLDS THE ARMED FORCES TOGETHER AND WITH HIS DISAPPEARANCE DISUNITY OF ARMED FORCES WOULD BECOME SERIOUS. AFTER THIS REGIME THERE WILL BE ONLY A SCRAMBLE OF PERSONS FOR POWER IN CONTRAST TO THE INSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF DEMOCRACY WHICH THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION IS ATTEMPTING TO CONSTRUCT. "THIS REGIME IS TRYING TO GIVE BIRTH TO DEMOCRACY AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS THROUGH THE STRATEGIC HAMLET PROGRAM, REPUBLICAN YOUTH, AND OTHER MEASURES AND PROGRAMS."

15. [REDACTED] COMMENT. FROM THE CONTEXT OF NHU'S COMMENTS AND THE MANNER IN WHICH HE PRESENTED THEM, THE IMPRESSION WAS GIVEN THAT HE WAS NOT A CENTRAL OR IMPORTANT PARTICIPANT IN ANY IMMEDIATE SENSE IN THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION OR IN

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THE GENERAL OFFICERS" PLANNING AND ACTION. IN SOME WAYS, HE GAVE THE IMPRESSION OF OBSERVING THESE DEVELOPMENTS FROM THE PERIPHERY, DESPITE HIS APPROVAL OF THE DECISIONS AND ACTIONS TAKEN, AN APPROVAL WHICH HE CLAIMS TO HAVE GIVEN POST FACTO. HE GAVE NO IMPRESSION OF BEING A PRIME MOVER WITH THE GENERAL OFFICERS OR EVEN WITH DIEM.

16. [REDACTED] DISSEM. STATE, ARMY, NAVY, AIR, USMACV, MAAG, AID, USIA, 2ND AIR DIVISION, 9TH FIELD STATION, CINCPAC, PACFLT, PACAF, ARPAC.

END OF MESSAGE

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**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY**

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COUNTRY	SOUTH VIETNAM	REPORT NO.	[REDACTED] (CORRECT)
SUBJECT	NGO DINH NHU'S STATEMENTS ON THE GOVERNMENT ACTIONS AGAINST THE BUDDHISTS, DIEM'S INDISPENSIBILITY, THO'S SUCCESSION, AND HIS OWN DISINTEREST IN LEADERSHIP	DATE DISTR.	23 AUGUST 1963
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PLACE & DATE ACQ.	VIETNAM, SAIGON (22 AUGUST 1963)	REFERENCES	IN 04630 05070
APPRAISAL	[REDACTED]	FIELD REPORT NO.	

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SOURCE APPR [REDACTED]

CORRECTION

AN EIGHT PAGE INFORMATION REPORT WITH THE ABOVE NUMBER WAS ISSUED ON 23 AUGUST 1963. PAGE EIGHT, PARAGRAPH 15, LINE FIVE, SHOULD BE CONTINUED AS FOLLOWS:

WHILE THE ACTION AGAINST THE BUDDHIST LEADERSHIP AND PAGODAS REPRESENTS THE SPECIFIC FULFILLMENT OF NHU'S GENERAL POLICY VIEWS, HE WAS IN NO SENSE IN AN EXULTANT MOOD. ON THE CONTRARY, NHU WAS OBVIOUSLY WORRIED AND PREOCCUPIED. DESPITE HIS STATEMENT THAT THE ARMED FORCES ARE FIRMLY

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GROUP 1 Excluded from automatic downgrading and declassification

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**TELEGRAM INFORMATION REPORT TELEGRAM**

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 E.O. 13526, SEC. 3.5  
 NLK-17-435  
 By *MP* NARA, Date 5/17

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IN DIEM'S HANDS, HE DID NOT SEEM AS SURE OF THIS AS HE CLAIMED TO BE. HE IS OBVIOUSLY AWARE OF THE DANGERS IN THE PRESENT SITUATION AND OF FUTURE DANGERS, POTENTIAL AND CONTINGENT. NHU MAY NOT NECESSARILY FEEL THAT HE COULD SURVIVE HIS BROTHER. HOWEVER, HIS CLAIM TO HAVE NO INTEREST IN THE SUCCESSION IF HIS BROTHER LEAVES THE SCENE IS NOT ACCEPTED.

END OF MESSAGE

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