

# Vietnamese Leader Addresses Congress, May 9, 1957

By ANDREW GLASS



*U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge presents his credentials to President Ngo Dinh Diem (center) at the presidential palace in Saigon on Aug. 26, 1963, weeks before Diem was slain after surrendering in a coup backed by the U.S. government. | Horst Faas/AP Photo*

On this day in 1957, Ngo Dinh Diem, president of South Vietnam, addressed a joint meeting of Congress during a two-week visit to the United States. After his country's negotiated partition, Diem had seized power in a rigged 1955 election in the south that left the north in communist hands. Diem was viewed in Washington as a firm ally against the threatened spread of communism in Southeast Asia. On May 8, he flew to Washington from Hawaii aboard President Dwight D. Eisenhower's official plane, Columbine III, a Lockheed Constellation. The president and John Foster Dulles, the secretary of state, greeted him at National Airport with full military honors — including a 21-gun salute.

The New York Times editorialized that *“President Diem ... is a substantial partner in a going enterprise on behalf of free men in his country and in ours. We honor him and make him doubly welcome on that account.”*

About 50,000 people lined the route taken by Diem's motorcade from the airport to his country's embassy. Andrew Tully of The Washington Daily News wrote that, in failing to respond to the greetings of the spectators, **Diem's “air of modest solemnity was far more impressive than any grinning, arm-waving performance could have been.”** House Speaker Sam Rayburn (D-Texas) and Vice President Richard Nixon presided over the joint meeting. Diem voiced his gratitude to Washington for “moral and material aid” and concluded his 20-minute speech by soliciting more financial aid.

Said Diem: *“The Republic of Vietnam, the youngest republic in Asia, soon will be 2 years old. Our Republic was born among great suffering. She is courageously facing up to economic competition with the Communists, despite heavy and difficult conditions, which become daily more complex.*

*“Vietnam nevertheless has good reason for confidence and hope. Her people are intelligent, have imagination and courage. They also draw strength from the moral and material aid they receive from the free world, particularly that given by the American people.*

*“In the face of increased international tension and Communist pressure in Southeast Asia,” Diem added, “I could not repeat too often how much the Vietnamese people are grateful for American aid and how much they are conscious of its importance, profound significance and amount.”*

The legislators gave Diem a standing ovation. His visit to Capitol Hill concluded with a lunch in the Senate District Committee Room. On his third day in Washington, Diem spoke at a National Press Club lunch. He attacked Asian leaders who had taken a neutralist stance in the Cold War, asserting that “since communism is not neutral, we cannot be neutral.”

Diem's rule was authoritarian and nepotistic. He was assassinated on Nov. 2, 1963, during a military coup that toppled his regime. President John F. Kennedy secretly sanctioned Diem's downfall. On learning of Diem's ouster and death at age 62, North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh said, *“I can scarcely believe the Americans would be so stupid.”*

SOURCE: HISTORY.HOUSE.GOV