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TO: Ambassador Bunker DATE: July 3, 1967
FROM: Ed Lansdale
SUBJECT: A Provincial Outlook

For your information.

The attached memo by Cal Mehlert of SLO reports the views of the An Giang Province Chief about the forthcoming Presidential election. The two became friends when Mr. Mehlert was the USAID representative in An Giang.

cc: Ambassador Locke
General Westmoreland
Ambassador Komer
Mr. Calhoun
Mr. Hart
Mr. Jacobson

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4
NLJ 92-224
By , NARA, Date 8-13-92

SLO:EGLansdale:rm

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TO: General Lansdale DATE: July 3, 1967
FROM: Calvin E. Mehlert DECLASSIFIED
SUBJECT: Talk with Colonel Ly ba Pham E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4
By hwl, NARA, Date 8-13-92

The morning of July 2, Colonel Ly ba Pham (please protect source), Province Chief of An Giang, and I discussed the latest political developments over coffee downtown. A summary of our conversation follows:

I reminded Colonel Pham of his statement to me on the 28th that both Ky and Thieu were putting pressures on him to support their respective candidacies, and that he disliked very much being put in this dilemma. I asked him how he felt about the new Thieu/Ky line-up. Pham said that the new situation was "very good," because he was no longer caught in a cross-fire. He intended to conduct "absolutely fair" elections in An Giang.

I asked Pham if this would really be possible. Had he not told me that Ky, on the 28th, had ordered him and all other military province chiefs to support military candidates? Pham replied that the current situation in Viet Nam demanded that the elections be free and fair. Only a just election can provide the foundation for a stable government.

I then asked Pham if the election were truly fair would a military or civilian candidate be elected. Pham did not want to answer. I told him to forget the question if he did not care to reply. Slowly, he said that "the people" do not want a military government; they are "tired" of the military. If the election is free, he believed a civilian would be elected.

In that case, I said, would not he and most other province chiefs lose their jobs. "Right! And I'm ready to go anytime," Pham replied.

I asked Pham which ticket, in his mind, "would be best for Viet Nam." Without hesitation he replied "General Minh and Lieng." The antipathy between Ky and Thieu is dangerous, he said. Minh would be above this rivalry and is widely popular. Lieng is also a respected and popular person. Further, Lieng had been a friend and associate of Nguyen huu Tho, Chairman of the NLF. They had shared the same office as lawyers. This relationship could well be helpful in the future.

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I asked if the new Thieu/Ky line-up reflected any basic change in the power positions of the two. Pham said no, "Everything is the same as before."

Finally, I asked Pham what would be the result if the elections are not fair, and if there continues to be little progress in reducing corruption. Pham replied, "In that case, we are finished."

Comment: Colonel Pham sounded sincere in his support of free elections. However, his Deputy Province Chief, Tran dac Thanh, told me the night before the above conversation that his biggest problems in organizing a fair election would come from Colonel Pham himself. I suspect this may be true. Pham is strongly authoritarian. He has told me many times that the duty of the people is to obey and the responsibility of the authorities is to provide good government. How a fair election fits into Pham's view of a properly run society, I don't know. He may conclude that the least disadvantageous policy for him is to refrain from any attempt at manipulation. Or, if his support for Duong van Minh is genuine, he may work discretely on the latter's behalf. Or, quite possibly, he may conclude that the Thieu/Ky ticket will win, that he does not wish to alienate the probable victors, and end up by supporting the incumbents.

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