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TO: Ambassador Bunker DATE: July 2, 1967
FROM: Ed Lansdale
SUBJECT: A Political View

The attached memo by Rufe Phillips reports a conversation with Vo van Hai that I believe you will find of interest. Hai was executive secretary to President Diem, so highly regarded for his personal integrity that he was the only individual closely associated with Diem who was not on the reprisal list of the revolutionary group who overthrew Diem.

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

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

SLO:EGLansdale:rm

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TO: General Lansdale
FROM: Rufus C. Phillips
SUBJECT: Conversation with Vo van Hai

DATE: June 30, 1967

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NIJ 92-224

By pu, NARA, Date 8-13-92

1. Vo van Hai dropped by to say that he was running for the Senate on a slate headed by former General Hoanh. The slate, including alternates, has three Southerners, three Northerners and six candidates from the Center. It has both Buddhists and Catholics and was formed without soliciting support from any of the religious groups or from the Presidential candidates. All are honest men, according to Hai, and "true patriots" who have similar political beliefs and will work together as a team. In typical modest fashion, Hai has put himself last on the list.

2. Hai threw some light on General Huynh van Cao's difficulties in getting on a Senatorial list. It seems that Cao set as a condition for his participation that he head the list. Finally, Cao wound up putting together his own list at the last moment. Hai was not sure that Cao would make the closing date of today.

3. The conversation then turned to Hai's feelings about the Presidential race. Hai said that he wanted me to know that, as an old friend, he felt deeply that it would be disastrous for Viet Nam and for the Americans if either Ky or Thieu were elected. He said that this was not because of any prejudice on his part against the military, on the contrary, an ex-general was heading his Senatorial list. It was because neither Ky nor Thieu were regarded with any respect by the Vietnamese people. If they had taken action to reform the Army and do something for the people while they had been in power they could have won popular support and would not now have to cheat in order to win. To the contrary, however, the people know that the Government and the Army was more corrupt than ever. They would therefore not vote for either Ky or Thieu unless ordered to.

4. Hai said that it was better in Vietnamese eyes to have a "virtuous" but weak man as President than a strong man who was regarded as either corrupt or prone to excess. An honest and moral man, as President, capable of forming a good team around him including a strong Prime Minister could rally the people and

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help to give Viêt Nam something to fight for. Hai seemed to favor Huong although he did not come out and say so.

5. Hai went on to say, that as patriotic Vietnamese, his slate would be critical of some of the ways in which American aid was being given and American influence utilized. He said he hoped that we would understand that this was constructive criticism, but that in the future the Vietnamese Government would have to begin to stand on its own two feet and not appear to be only an errand boy of the Americans. This was the Vietnamese impression of the present Government, he said.

6. In parting, I wished Hai well in his campaign. Afterwards in reflecting on what he had to say, I was disturbed. Hai is one of the few Vietnamese I know whom I trust as being absolutely sincere and honest. Back during the most difficult final days of Diem, Hai's predictions and estimates of Vietnamese reactions were almost always right. Hai may be wrong about Vietnamese reactions to Ky and Thieu; but the only way that a Ky will be able to rally the support of honest Vietnamese such as Hai is to win honestly and to take extraordinary measures to prove that the elections are honest. I feel that everyone, including Ky, would be better off if both Ky and Thieu stepped aside from their Government positions during the campaign. The matter of being able to give orders to the Province Chiefs is of particular importance.

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