

December 6, 1985

Dear Fred,

Our brief conversation about the Philippines aroused some thoughts and observations from past experience which are by no means original to me, being shared by Bui Diem and others. I hope you will forgive me in advance if I seem to restate the obvious, but we both recall the myriad instances in Vietnam where the US failed to do or preplan the obvious, often with the excuse "Oh well, we'll win anyway." I'm sure that slogan, at least, is no longer in vogue!

A Marcos or Ngo Dinh Diem situation presents an essential issue, whether a bad structure is more dangerous than its possible alternative, no structure. If, in the Philippines, there are fair elections resulting in an orderly transfer of power, then the issue may not be raised. This letter addresses itself to the other situation, where the present state of affairs continues, with or without elections, and the US is faced with the issue of some degree of concurrency in measures to "pull the plug" on the Marcos regime, a la Ngo Dinh Diem.

It is certainly true that no structure may be even worse than a bad structure, as South Vietnam found out and South Africa may one day have to find out, alas, but the solution is to arrange matters in advance so that a bad structure and no structure are not the only alternatives. To this end I believe that the U.S. must have in advance what it did not have in Vietnam, namely any objective blue-print and practical action plan for the survival and freedom of the Philippines to present immediately to whatever elements might succeed Marcos for their consideration and implementation, to which our aid and cooperation could be keyed. We should identify in advance what economic measures, what social and political reforms and what military and security actions should be taken to assure the success of freedom and democracy in the Philippines whoever the new leadership might be. This blue-print would, of course, be sufficiently flexible to take into account unforeseen developments and the proper concerns of the Filipino side. I submit that our great failing in 1963 was not the fact that Ngo Dinh Diem was overthrown, as such, but that the United States, and specifically the newly arrived Henry Cabot Lodge, had not prepared in advance a practical plan and program of action which the new leadership should implement to save the country. Lodge largely stood idly by, and ordered others to do so as well, at the precise moment when Duong van Minh and Le Van Kim were in desperate need of counsel and South Vietnam more prepared than ever before or after to take the measures necessary for its own salvation.

Without our own plans solidly in place in advance, I think "plug-pulling" can be irresponsible, if not reprehensible, and fraught with dire consequences both for our friends and for us.

Again, forgive if I restate the too obvious.

As ever,

*John*