

The Ambassador

September 7, 1963

Rufus Phillips

Conversation with Vo Van Hai on 6 September 1963

1. Hai said that he was extremely discouraged because the President had become so completely dependent on Mr. Nhu. Mr. Nhu not only wrote all of his speeches but his answers to press queries as well. However, Nhu was always careful to preserve the President's feelings that he and not Nhu actually made the decisions.
2. Hai was of the opinion that extreme pressure on the President by the American Ambassador might make him relinquish Mr. Nhu, but he was not optimistic that this would be successful.
3. The only acceptable alternative was an overthrow of the Government. Mr. Nhu's continued presence, Hai felt, would be a disaster. The Americans should be firm and apply pressure, making their position known quietly by actions isolating the Nhu's. He said that the American Ambassador by being discreet about making public pronouncements was using good tactics but at the same time he should make his true position sufficiently clear so that opponents of the Nhu's would not lose heart.
4. Hai said he favored a change in Government now, even if it meant losing the President, because the Government had completely lost the confidence of the people which it could not regain with the Nhu's in it. He said any subsequent government must not be a military dictatorship; that the Americans should be firm on that point. Nor should the Government be one of a national union character with each political segment such as the Cao Dai or the Dai Viet represented by a Minister. This would bring the entourage of each of these factions into the Government and would result in corruption and inefficiency.
5. Any provisional government, Hai believed, should contain mainly technicians and military and should remain in office for at least two to three years. To have free elections for both the executive and assembly branches within a shorter period would, he thought, produce chaos.
6. Comment: Continued caution should be exercised to protect Vo Van Hai as an American friend and a source. I do not believe it advisable for Mr. Mendenhall to see him for this reason.

cc: Mr. Trueheart ✓

S E C R E T

GROUP 4

Downgraded at 3-year intervals.
Declassified after 12 years.