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EYES ONLY

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Ambassador Nolting

July 12, 1963

John M. Mecklin

1700 12 2
June 2 4 A.M.

Mr. Phillips' Memo of July 5 to Mr. Trueheart

Mr. Phillips has asked me to comment on the suggestion that General Lansdale be brought to Vietnam in what might be regarded as a sort of last-ditch effort to reestablish U. S. influence with President Diem. While there are surely considerations in such a suggestion with which I am not acquainted, I think it makes eminent good sense in principle.

I have known Lansdale well for more than ten years, including the period in 1954-55 when he was extraordinarily effective in helping Diem stay in power. He is not only an old friend to whom Diem is deeply indebted. He is also an exceptionally perceptive and persuasive personality whose ideas and advice should be most valuable to you in the explosive weeks that may lie immediately ahead.

It is my strong impression, as Phillips notes, that the U. S. has very nearly expended its credit with the Diem regime. Your personal relationship with him, and your record of notably honorable service here, are just about all that remains. I think we must recognize, however, that we are verging on a collision between what Diem considers (wrongly) to be his vital interests and the vital interests here of the United States, where the effectiveness of standard diplomatic procedures will be sorely tried and perhaps ultimately inadequate.

The problem, if one may generalize rather recklessly, has very nearly narrowed to Diem's individual personality traits, to the need to persuade him at a basic, human level to break out of the neurotic straight-jacket in which he seems increasingly to be wrapping himself, and be reasonable.

If any man outside the Ngo Dinh family, much less a foreigner, can achieve this, it must be done at a relatively "unofficial" level -- if you will, on an "advisory" basis. I don't see how you can make this kind of approach (even if you felt so inclined) while at the same time applying the massive diplomatic pressure that probably must be maintained

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on the Palace. Lansdale, in contrast, should be able to approach Diem concurrently on an old-friends, gee-whiz-what-a-mess basis. It's a long reach, but I don't see how it could do any harm.

Perhaps I should also note a fact that Phillips' memo overlooked: that Lansdale also established a fairly friendly relationship with Nhu during his earlier operations in Vietnam.

If not on a TDY basis, how about getting Lansdale out at least on a visit to have a look at the problem, take a reading on the Ngo Dinh family's state of mind and come up with recommendations on possible U. S. action in light of Mr. Lodge's imminent arrival?

cc: Mr. Bohannon ✓
General Richard Stilwell

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