

SECRET

The Ambassador

September 5, 1963

Rufus Phillips

Comments of Colonel Hoang Van Lac, Chief of the Permanent Bureau of Interministerial Committee on Strategic Resalets on 5 September.

1. Colonel Lee is the highly competent Vietnamese officer in charge of the office which runs the Strategic Hamlet Program. He is an honest, level-headed, patriotic officer, without personal political ambitions. He seldom comments on politics.

2. Colonel Lac said that the Strategic Hamlet program had greatly slowed down in progress over the past 3 months because of the diversion of official attention to the Buddhist problem and deteriorating relations between Vietnamese and Americans. He went on to say that good relations between Americans and Vietnamese were absolutely essential to the success of the program.

3. Colonel Lec said he had made his views clear to Minister Luong (Interior) and Thuan (Defense) that American cooperation was essential and that the program had particularly deteriorated in the Delta. Colonel Lec said he told both ministers that the program was at present a failure in the Delta, with the exception of portions of Kien Hoa, Kien Phong and An Giang Provinces.

4. Colonel Lac said he regretted and deplored the articles appearing in the Times of Vietnam and the attitude of certain elements of the Government toward the Americans. This attitude was inevitably reflected at lower levels and, if continued, would make progress impossible.

5. Colonel Lee went on to say that in his opinion, the Nhu's would not last 24 hours if the Americans made it clear that they would not tolerate what was being said about them. He said that everyone knew, including Nhu, that Vietnam was absolutely dependant upon American support to defeat the Communists and that if Nhu made any move to get the Americans out, or if the Americans made any move to get out because of the Nhu's, that Nhu was finished. Any action by Nhu which was clearly turning the country over to the communists, such as negotiations with the DRV or actions forcing the Americans out, would provoke an almost universal reaction from the officer corps of the Army.

S E C R E T

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[illegible]

GROUP 4

General or Highline upgraded at 3-year intervals.

Declassified after 12 years.