

For information order NLR-82-31

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EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

September 17, 1963

Mac:

This does not add to what you already know;
but I still think that Phillips' judgments of Vietnamese
reactions are as good as any we have. If you think
of it, he is the only reporter we have with first hand
-- long term knowledge of the situation both in
Saigon and in the field.

Mike Forrestal

Att: Memo by Rufus C. Phillips

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Comments on the Necessity for an Advance Decision
to Introduce U.S. Forces in Viet-Nam

NUK-82-31

- 1. I wish to express my strong disagreement with the need to hinge our GVN upon to doing anything in Viet-Nam to change the/making a decision now /commit U.S. forces there, as expressed by Mr. Mecklin to the Cabinet level meeting of 10 September, and in his paper "A Policy for Viet-Nam".
- 2. Mr. Mecklin stated that in order to achieve the desirable policy objective of ousting the Nhus, without allowing the VC to make unacceptable gains, it was necessary to decide in advance to introduce U.S. Combat forces into Viet-Nam. Such a decision is necessary under all circumstances according to Mr. Mecklin, because there is real danger that a successor regime would be even more ineffective or that Vietnamese military forces would fragment into rival camps.
- 3. The dangers Mr. Mecklin has cited certainly exist, however, he over-stresses them. Mr. Mecklin also overestimates Mr. Nhu's strength and the potential opposition's weakness. If the opinions of many key Vietnamese who speak as intimate friends can be considered evidence, Nhu commands little true loyalty. At present he has support from certain key military figures such as Col. Tung and General Dinh but this is based more on more opportunism and on their loyalty to the President than to Nhu. Nhu is a cold ruthless man who has denigrated on occasion ~~designated~~ most of his followers in front of others. This has earned him intense dislike along with fear and respect for his brains but not deep loyalty.

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By <i>TRIMM</i> US ARCHIVIST (NUK-82-31) NARS Date 4/2/82	

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4. Secondly, the officer corps is not as indecisive or divided as it may seem to an outsider. The Gwnerals did not launch a coup because they lacked the troops, a plan, confidence in the U.S. support for the GVN as well as word sufficiently favorable of support for the coup. and a climate of opinion among the officer corps. The key missing item was confidence in the U.S. -- without some tangible evidence of U.S. support it was extremely difficult if not impossible to ~~xxad~~ rally the subordinate unit commanders required. With the tide of sentiment running high in the officer corps against the Nhus - it will not be difficult to mobilize if this sentiment ~~xxf~~ the U.S. acts. But words of criticism only have little meaning. They have been heard before (after the 1960 coup, after the Taylor Mission, etc.)

5. In my opinion it will not be necessary to go so far as to cut off all aid. Selective cuts keyed to a carefully managed psychological warfare campaign aimed at specific targets such as Tung and the Nhus will seriously undermine confidence in the Nhus while restoring confidence in the U.S. A local "cold war" will certainly ensure. We must be prepared for it with the necessary funds to go around Saigon, if this is required, to keep the province program moving. The crisis will require steady nerves and it will ~~xxp~~ probably produce ~~xx~~ retaliatory action by Nhu such as the declaration of certain Americans persona non grata. We must be prepared to stand our ground, request precise evidence and so forth, and keep tightening the thumb screws. We must be careful to aim each action at the Nhus, thus if the war effort is impaired the blame can be pinned on the Nhus.

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Given the feelings of the officer corps against the Viet Cong so heavily cited by the Defense Department, it is extremely likely that they will act before the VC make any serious inroads.

6. Concerning the stability of any successor regime, the generals have declared and there is little reason to doubt their sincerity, that they do not wish a military dictatorship. Many of them cite Korea as an example of what they do not want. Detailed discussion, during the preparatory period of the abortive coup, revealed that the Generals want a mixed government with minor army participation. ^{Their} ~~This~~ main interest being to reform the army, the civil administration in the provinces so that both would cooperate and fight the war with the degree of spirit required to win. There is some danger, of course, of a struggle for power but it is conditioned in Viet-Nam by the need to work together in order to survive.

7. Certainly no one should rule out the possibility of the ultimate use of U.S. troops and they should be ready to protect dependents if the going gets rough before Nhu topples but the entire policy should not be hinged on this contingency. The use of U.S. troops to fight the war against the VC would ~~if~~ in any case, be a mistake. The Vietnamese are willing to fight and can fight. If we can help give them a government worth fighting for, this single action will be worth more than any number of U.S. troops.

8. This need to give the Vietnamese something worth fighting for and without the conclusion that the Vietnamese will fight to win for a government with the thus are what Mr. Mecklin and I agree upon. However I believe he underestimates the results of a determined psychological warfare campaign by the U.S. (both covert and overt) to prepare the stage for a successful overthrow of the GVN while being too optimistic about the possible results of the direct use of US forces.

Rufus C. Phillips