

"T" *Chen*

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: General Cao (Cao Dai)
Rufus Phillips

DATE: 10 September 1965

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1. Cao said when Government first heard about Lansdale coming, General Thi flew to Saigon and asked General Thieu to prevent it because Lansdale was "dangerous". Thieu consulted General Chieu who reassured him that Lansdale was a friend and that he had nothing to fear. Thieu then told Thi that he could not prevent Lansdale from coming without embarrassing Lodge. Also because it might hurt the overall American commitment to Viet-Nam.

2. Cao said the situation in the Cao Dai was that both General Tat and General Phuong were on the outs with the church hierarchy. Phuong because he had organized demonstrations in the province in favor of his father who is in charge of the social arm of the church but who was reprimanded by the church for having signed the Front Declaration against Prime Minister Quat. This was done without the church's authorization and as a result Tat's father will not be re-elected when his term of office expires in a few months.

3. Because of factionalism among the Cao Dai laity, Cao recommends that General Lansdale first meet with the church hierarchy. This will be arranged by a letter inviting Lansdale to such a meeting (probably at Tay Ninh, but possibly at Saigon). After that Cao suggests that General Lansdale invite Tat, Phuong, Vang (phonetic), and Cao to dinner to have an open and honest discussion on Cao Dai unity. He recommends against a meeting with Tat or Phuong at the present time until after meeting the church hierarchy. (This would be primarily _____ and Bao Te, leaders of the legislative branch, and _____, leaders of the temporal branch.)

4. According to Cao, the Cao Dai religious leaders are in the best position to mediate between the Catholics and the Buddhists and would be willing to do so. He said Dr. Khoach (Chairman of Interfaith Council) was a good man but had gotten too involved in politics to do this job. He felt that the best approach to the idea of getting

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religious leaders together to morally condemn the Communists would again be through the Cao Dai if they were willing to take the lead. He suggested that General Lansdale should then see the Hoa Hao, Buddhists and Catholics in that order after seeing the Cao Dai. Cao felt strongly that General Lansdale would do much to unify the Cao Dai.

5. Cao said that he had been asked by Thi, Khanh, Huong and Quat governments to accept a post but had refused. Now he was being asked by Ung to become his deputy. He wondered what I thought about it. I explained what we thought about the Ministry (i.e., that it ought not to be a Ministry but the Secretariat of the Rural Construction Council with Ung as a strong Secretary General). Cao said he agreed and would advise Ung to take his Ministerial staff and make it the Secretariat of the Council. However, he (Cao) recommended that this be a joint Vietnamese-American staff. I told him this would have to be a Vietnamese idea but the Americans would be happy to participate. I pointed out that the opposition might come from the Generals because of their fears about a joint military command. Cao said he was going to tell Ung that he would become his Deputy provided Ung concentrated on his role as Secretary General rather than Minister. Cao said he felt sure he could sell the joint staff idea, and hoped the American contribution could be kept small (no more than five).

6. Cao said he had followed newspaper reaction to General Lansdale's arrival very closely. Catholic newspapers very favorable while Buddhist papers said nothing. Characterized general reaction as Cao Dai, Hoa Hao and particularly Catholics very happy while Generals and Buddhists apprehensive.

